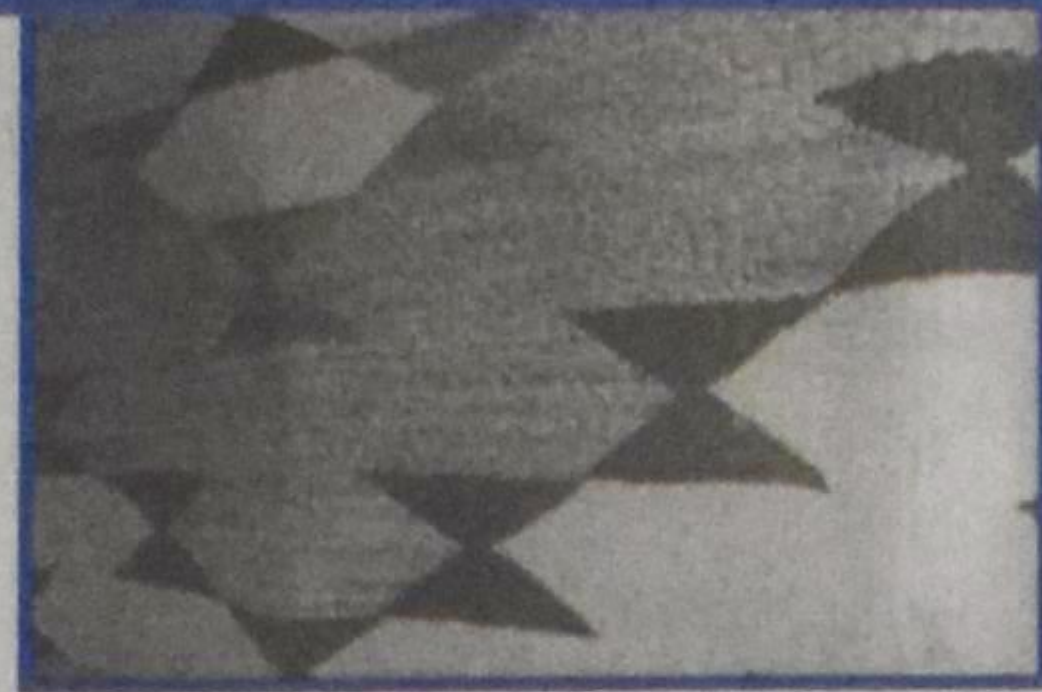




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Do our churches protect refugees?
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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

CHRISTIANCOURIER



Groups pray over Enbridge pipelines

Will Braun

The liturgy was as peculiar as the location.

Sixty of us stood in a snowy Manitoba ditch near the international border. We stood beside an Enbridge pumping station and directly above six buried pipelines that constitute the largest single conduit of crude oil to the U.S.

The worship leader gave us a rare permission:

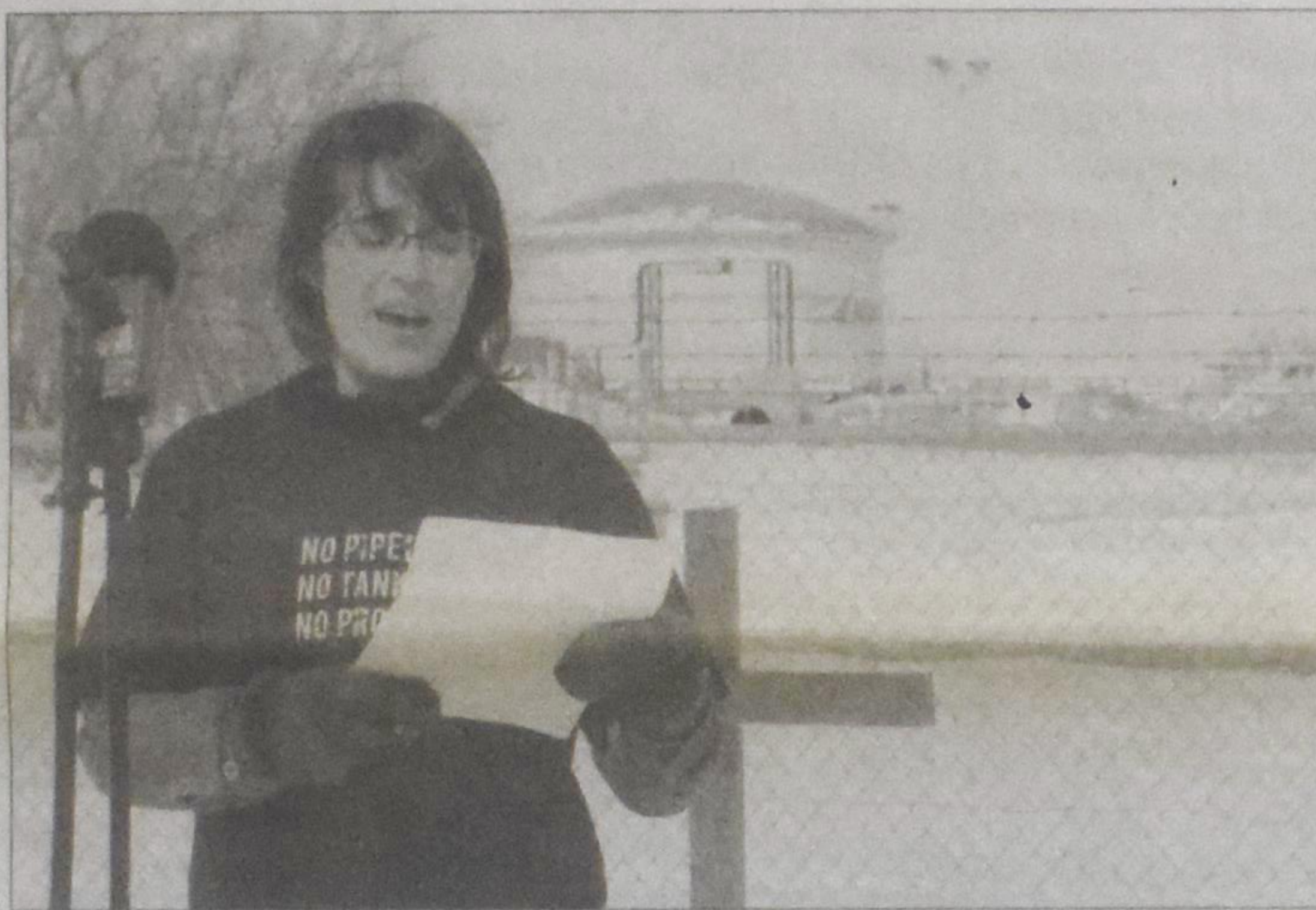
Today, we take a step back from our need to fix and solve. We put aside forced optimism. We will not look at the bright side. . . . We will walk into the valley of the shadow.

The Holy Saturday event near Gretna, Manitoba was a service of lament, one of two held along the pipeline that day. It was an occasion to let our souls vent.

As oil coursed silently through the earth beneath us — roughly 80,000 barrels in the short time we were there — we lamented the impossibly daunting reality of climate change.

We lamented the threat posed to indigenous people and lands in the path of the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline in northern B.C. We lamented our own entanglement in the complicated reality of oil.

Drawing on biblical symbols,



Coral Maloney reads a lament standing above an Enbridge pipeline in Gretna, Man.

we put ash on our foreheads and sackcloth around our arms, as the giant pumps hummed in the background.

The March 30 service, which drew people of all ages from a handful of mostly Mennonite churches, was organized by an ad hoc group of people concerned about the Northern Gateway pipeline and climate change.

Along the same lines

The inspiration for this particular event came from The Hermitage, a Mennonite-run spiritual retreat centre near Three Rivers, Michigan.

The wooded part of the 24-hectare Hermitage grounds is bisected by a swath of bare land in which Enbridge's Line 6B is buried. That is the same line that infamously spilled into the Kalamazoo River, about 110 kilometres from the Hermitage, in 2010, resulting in the largest pipeline spill in U.S. history.

Now the company is planning to replace a 335-kilometre stretch of Line 6B and increase its capacity from 240,000 barrels per day to

500,000. The \$1.6-billion project will require widening the corridor through the Hermitage woods by another 17 metres. An additional work easement will be cleared, though it can be replanted later.

Last July, the Hermitage filed a petition to intervene with state regulators, a move Enbridge lawyers sought to have denied on procedural grounds. Later the Hermitage abandoned the legal path.

"It became really quite clear that [Enbridge] was sure of getting a permit," said Naomi Wenger. Wenger co-directs the Hermitage and walks the trails through the centre's woods six mornings a week with her dog Ellie.

Her and her colleagues felt that any legal intervention on their part would simply "delay the inevitable." Lack of resources to hire a lawyer was also a factor.

Instead, the Hermitage board decided to hold a service of lamentation on the pipeline right-of-way and use compensation money received from Enbridge for al-

See Pipelines on page 2

Mission, not survival

Fresh expressions of the church in Canada

John P. Bowen

Why has the theme of mission come to the fore in recent years? Because the world has changed. The church used to fit snugly at the centre of society, a hub of ideas and activity. A lot of societal traffic went through the church. During these centuries, "mission" was something that happened elsewhere, usually overseas where (presumably) it was needed. Of course, there were also "missions" here at home, but those were usually in city centres and served the needy and homeless. That was the extent of it. The church and missions were two different things. Church came first, and missions were simply one expression of the church's life, as and where they were needed. They were a minor-

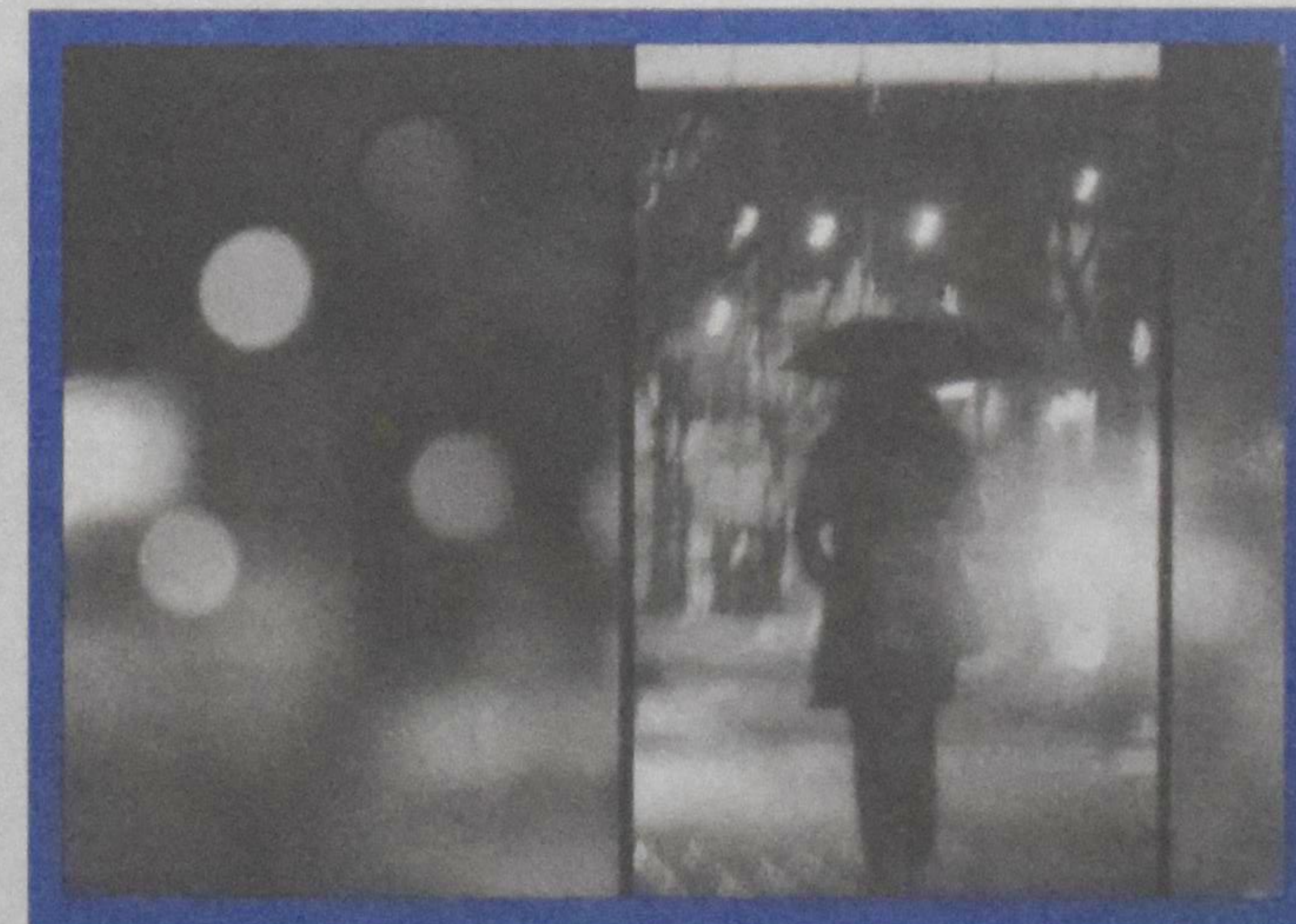
ity interest, on the fringes of most churches' lives, and occupying a small line in the annual budget.

Identity crisis

[But] the relationship of church and society has changed. So what now is church and what is it for? Is it just a historic relic of an earlier age?

This kind of question has provoked many Christian leaders and thinkers, teachers and writers, to go back to basics and to bring to the surface the long-submerged truth that the basic job of the church is to be involved in the mission of God to renew and redeem the world. In fact, unless the church is the servant of God's work, it has little reason to exist.

The scope of God's mission is *See Fresh expressions on page 2*



God has a heart for the city, says a new Christian church called Artisan, in Vancouver.

News

Pipeline *continued*

ternative energy projects. The board also stated that pipeline workers would not be vilified.

So while we prayed and sang beside the road on the Canadian prairies, staff and friends of the Hermitage prayed and sang 1,500 kilometres down the same pipeline system.

God with us

The 50 people gathered for that service confessed their participation in the consumptive ways that put pressure on the earth and the atmosphere. They prayed for “courage to use less, demand creative change and care deeply.” They took pieces of a mural that had been cut into strips and tied them around doomed trees.



Kirstin Vander Giessen-Reitsma, a Three Rivers resident who was at the service, was struck by the simple fact that this “cloud of witnesses” had gathered to “face [their] sins.” Just being there was a “confessional act.”



We confess complicity in the consumption that harms the earth.

Reflecting on the service, she also said that given the forces at play she felt that “hope in something beyond ourselves might just be a matter of survival.”

The group read a message of solidarity from our end of the pipeline and we incorporated part of their liturgy into ours, proclaiming our belief that pipelines are not the last word for

To view a five-minute video about the Gretna service, produced by Brad Langendoen, search for “Lament on the Line” at youtube.com.

the land and that there is “good work for Enbridge to do.”

As the group at the Hermitage sang a concluding song about the new day to come, we placed pieces of sackcloth over a cross in the ditch to mark our belief that God walks with us “through the valley of lamentation toward the path that rises toward transformation.”

It seemed right to gather at that place. In the U.S. and Canada pipelines have become the front line in a defining battle. On one side is the presumed imperative of conventional economic growth; on the other, an increasingly desperate push for environmental caution.

Amid this battle it seemed right to draw on religious tradition not as backing for a fight but as a path into the depths of the issue, from which the creative power of change can rise.

Will Braun is Senior Writer for Canadian Mennonite magazine. He lives in Morden, Man.

Fresh expressions *continued*

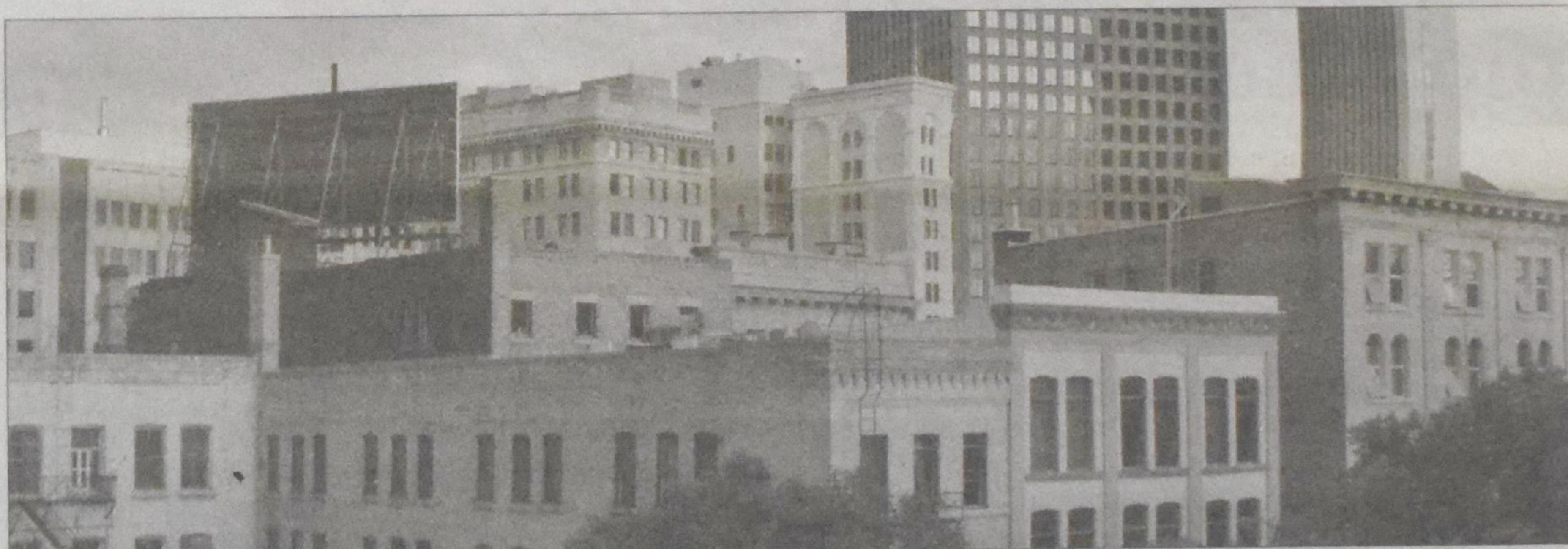
universal – as universal as God’s love for all of creation throughout all of time. And so, in one sense, the job of the church is always the same: to follow the lead of our missionary God and to put its energies into the things that God cares about. Mission is not what the church does in the world. It is about what God is doing in the world, with which we are commissioned to co-operate.

Renewed witness

What then is the church’s mission in Canada – for the here and now of Jesus’ followers in this country? One aspect of mission that is being rediscovered these days is that of church planting. [That used to mean] buying a piece of land in a new subdivision, putting up an A-frame church building, appointing a full-time pastor, and putting out a sign advertising service times, in the sure knowledge that “if you build it, they will come.”

In Western countries like Canada [today], where the number of those with no religious affiliation and no church background grows with each passing year, especially among the young, it is more often the case that “if you build it,” they will neither notice nor care.

Of course, there are exceptions. I think of a Coptic Orthodox Church in Toronto that is attracting hundreds of young people whose background is neither Coptic nor Orthodox, but that makes few concessions to Western culture (except that services are in English, and the length of the service is



A local group of missional Christians live together in Little Flowers Community, downtown Winnipeg.

something over an hour). Some of this may be attributed to a postmodern fascination with mystery, ritual and tradition. More may be due to the perennial power of a friend’s invitation, “Hey, come with me. You might just like it.”

But in many cases, church planting in a post-Christendom world is more likely to arise from the grassroots, seeded by Christian involvement in a particular community. One young Canadian church planter told me, “We’re not setting out to plant churches. We’re just setting out to be witnesses to the gospel. But where the gospel takes root through that witness, new churches will be the result.” One might ask, where people begin to respond to the gospel, why can they not simply get involved in existing churches, and maybe help revive them? The answers are sad but not hard to find. Not infrequently, the problem is the existing church, which is unwilling to be flexible in order to accommodate the new believers – which is rather as if a family should refuse to change its way of doing things in order to accommodate the needs of a newborn baby.

Lead by serving

So how do new churches begin today if not with a building and a paid pastor? There is a methodology emerging among young church planters. It begins not with a building but with relationships; with serving rather than with leading services; and with discerning where God is already at work rather than with a program. Often these new ventures are led by lay people. Not infrequently those who begin

them are bivocational – working at a part-time job in order to support their church planting. And many of these new communities will not be recognizably “church-like” in the early stages – which may last several years. Hence the phrase that they are “fresh expressions of church.” Bishop Steve Croft offers what I think is the clearest definition: a fresh expression of church, he suggests, is “the attempt to go to where people are, listen carefully to the context and through service form new communities of faith which have the potential to grow into church in their own right.”

All these dimensions of mission are, and will continue to be, facets of the church’s mission in Canada: ordinary Christians seeking to be salt and light in their communities – what Roman Catholics call “the apostolate of the laity”; a passion for inclusiveness, social justice and evangelism, which together form a Christ-honouring synthesis; and increasing freedom to pioneer fresh expressions of church.

Hope for the Church’s future

There is hope for the church, but it is not the hope of a return to a central place of power and influence and huge numbers in Canadian society. That will likely never happen, and we should probably heave a sigh of relief that those days are over, and thank God for it.

Our hope is, at the same time, more modest than that – and more grandiose. What we may realistically hope for is that we will once again find our place in the work of God

See Fresh expressions on page 3



No time for devotions? Download free mobile apps on Christian living from RedeemTheCommute.com, created by a new church plant in Ajax, Ont.

News

Fresh expressions *continued*

in Canada. What better future could we possibly pray for? The church began on the Day of Pentecost as a witness to the work of God in the world, and that is where the church will always find its direction, its energy and its destiny.

For the foreseeable future, the church in Canada is likely to be small and on the fringes of society, but so be it. Why does that matter? The fringes are where God seems to like to work. When God chose the people of Israel, they were "the smallest of all peoples" (Deut. 7:7) and quite insignificant in the world of the Middle East. The fringes of society are where Jesus spent most of his life. Paul understood this when he said that "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise" (1 Cor. 1:27-28). On the edge is a good place to be because God is there.

When I say there is hope for the church, however, do not misunderstand me. I do not mean there is hope that the church as we presently know it will "survive" – as though the main goal of church is to survive. Survival is not the most important thing. Indeed, according to Jesus, it is not a thing that should even be on our agenda: "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:35). He warns that if we spend our energies on saving our lives – and many congregations are doing just that – that is the surest way to guarantee our extinction. We will die out – and it will be no more than we deserve. We will have missed the whole point of church. Whereas, if we give our lives away – our time, our resources, our love – to the work of Jesus and his kingdom, that is how we will save our lives, even if it is not in this world.

This article is excerpted from John P. Bowen's new book, Green Shoots out of Dry Ground:

Growing a New Future for the Church in Canada, published by Wipf and Stock in January, available at amazon.ca and used here with permission of the author. A review of Green Shoots is forthcoming in CC.



From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom



How much teaching should a university professor do a year? How much time should they be given for research? How can we best educate students for their

future – for the least amount of money? As the cost of university education continues to rise, university communities and the press spend a lot of time talking about one of the largest parts of a university's budget: faculty salary. The public perception is that university professors do too little teaching and spend too much of their time doing "research," seen as a less valuable activity.

In the search for a healthier bottom line, it has been suggested that technology will help with what has come to be called Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), online computer courses offered to tens of thousands of students at a time. Others have called for "teaching-stream" professors who do more teaching and little or no research. There are also suggestions that community colleges could take on some of the responsibilities of universities and teach students for at least the first few years after high school at a reduced cost.

All of these suggestions need to be explored, and they may have a place in our education system as part of our collective attempt to address the increasing need for education in our modern society. It would be foolish to conclude prematurely that these strategies can play no role in helping us educate our youth at a reasonable cost. But, at the end of the day, I think it will prove important to keep the best parts of a traditional university education.

Learning outside the classroom

For the faculty at most universities, there are two parts to our teaching. The first is done in front of a classroom, where we lay out the latest knowledge about an area, give students insight into how problems are approached, and highlight what

Seeking sustainable higher education



Can MOOCs replace hands-on research?

things are still unknown. This teaching is generally our formal teaching load, which is defined at most universities by a collective agreement or common understanding.

The second and, I would suggest, perhaps the more important teaching that goes on in the universities is the one-on-one interaction between students and faculty. Sometimes this interaction is informal, such as a relationship that develops out of a course, or the interaction that happens in lab courses and in seminars, in which professors guide students to better understand how the discipline addresses significant problems. But there are also more formal one-on-one relationships that occur for students at all levels.

Currently in my laboratory I have seven students doing research projects with me: four students doing their capstone undergraduate course, their honours thesis; one student completing her Master of Science degree; and two PhD students. None of the interactions I have with these students are part of my formal teaching load, but supervising these students consumes considerable time.

Mentoring in person

In these research-based interactions, students learn much more than the spe-

cifics of the research project involving rats in my laboratory. They are usually researching a specific question, and hopefully their work will provide a small part of the answer to the problem, but in an important way their research contributions are incidental to the education they are getting.

What my students are learning is a set of skills: how to look at a problem; breaking it down into critical pieces; determining what we do not know; and finding a way to achieve an answer to a piece of a problem. From their interaction with the literature of past knowledge, they come to see that there are many pieces necessary to understand an issue. They frame a research hypothesis, figure out how to test it, run the experiment, and see if the answer is as expected. Usually the results are surprising in some way, which makes the writing of the thesis an interesting exercise in pulling all the threads together in a way that others will understand.

These are skills that can be used in many careers: although the students may never work with rats again, the lessons they learn while studying those rats will shape their approach to problems for all their lives. It is my job as a teacher to guide them in this learning. What is happening in our professor-student relationships is perhaps best described as discipleship or mentorship. This relationship requires the real problems experienced in research. I find it hard to imagine how mentorship could be enacted in a classroom or an MOOC. But one-on-one teaching is expensive. I hope our students appreciate the cost and the richness of the opportunity they are given.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca), who has supervised about 70 graduate and undergraduate honours students, is a member of the Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University.



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Editorials

Drawing the lines straight



May Drost

One of the most recognizable works of art in Christendom is probably the fresco of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* painted on the wall of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. Da Vinci's version of Christ's last meal with his disciples has been reproduced in countless ways: on black velvet mounted in spray-painted gilt frames, on posters available at any flea market and even in white cotton, crocheted by church ladies and hanging in fellowship halls or council meeting rooms. (According to Ross King in his book *Leonardo and the Last Supper*, the most faithful copy of the painting was done by one of Leonardo's apprentices, Giovanni Pietro Rizzoli in 1520.)

The ravages of time have destroyed much of the original fresco, but the world's fascination with it has not diminished over the years. Nor has its fascination with the main figure in the painting. Jesus Christ, too, has been re-copied in countless versions, not only in art, but also in the minds and hearts of people everywhere in the world. He has been represented as the son of God, a self-proclaimed prophet, a wise leader, a Ghandi-type figure in favour of peace and love, a human being who got carried away with his own claims to deity. He has been trivialized and demeaned. (The Beatles: "We are more popular than Jesus.") However bowdlerised or misrepresented over the centuries, it seems that Jesus Christ will not leave us alone, nor we him.

The ravages of time have destroyed much of the original fresco, but the world's fascination with it has not diminished over the years. Nor has its fascination with the main figure in the painting. Jesus Christ, too, has been re-copied in countless versions, not only in art, but also in the minds and hearts of people everywhere in the world. He has been represented as the son of God, a self-proclaimed prophet, a wise leader, a Ghandi-type figure in favour of peace and love, a human being who got carried away with his own claims to deity. He has been trivialized and demeaned. (The Beatles: "We are more popular than Jesus.") However bowdlerised or misrepresented over the centuries, it seems that Jesus Christ will not leave us alone, nor we him.

Focal point

According to Ross King, "One of the first things Leonardo did after laying his base coat of lead white on



This painting, literally Christ-centred, has resonated over centuries with Christians and non-Christians alike.

the wall . . . was to hammer a nail into the plaster. This nail marked the very centre of the mural, the point on which all lines and all attention would converge: the face of Christ. A small hole is still visible in the right temple of Christ, like an eerie prevision of the crown of thorns" (141). (Citing a sketch that Da Vinci made for the project, King writes that "he intended to use harmonic ratios to structure pictorial space." King notes as well that the lines radiating out from the nail hole are also still visible in the plaster.)

Thus using his technical precision, artistic genius and knowledge of mathematics and music, Da Vinci created what one might call a Christ-centred work that has resonated over the centuries with Christians and non-Christians alike. Da Vinci was by all accounts a snappy dresser (King mentions pink tights!), a bon vivant and not particularly outstanding in his devoutness as a Christian. He was, in short, a man of his time. Yet the story of his creation of *The Last Supper* can be considered as evidence of the power of the gospel and the work of the Spirit. Think about it:

Not so long after the Christian Church was founded, trouble began. As Nick Loenen said in his recent *Christian Courier* article (March 11, 2013), "Every paradise has its snake," and so it has been with the church. Debauched leaders, schisms, violence and abuse of the weak and powerless have besmirched the name of Christ almost from the beginning. And lest Protestant Christians think the Roman Catholic Church is especially culpable, post-Reformation history shows us that all Christians have drawn the orthogonals askew as it were: we have pulled humanity's spiritual eye away from the vanishing point, the Centre, i.e., the Christ, without whom the whole universe would fragment into meaninglessness. Thus the Reformation, in trying to correct the excesses of the Roman Catholic church, veered off into extremism, in part by destroying invaluable works of art and architecture.

That the Church, Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant has failed spectacularly in its mission cannot be denied. That being said, it is intriguing, if not miraculous, that the Scripture's witness to the centrality of Jesus still draws people today. (Enter: the Holy Spirit!) Part of the attraction is the power of the Bible as a literary collection of various genres of writing – stories, poems, letters and the like. Though some have tried to reduce its content to bumper sticker wisdom: "sin, salvation, service" for example, or the acronym "TULIP," Scripture has a depth and richness that can be mined for meaning today just as it could when the canon was first established. The literature of both testaments *understands* and *speaks* to our human predicament: that is its timeless and real attraction. Thus Scripture is the gateway through which people can be led to contemplate the reality of Jesus as the world's focal point.

And sometimes art such as Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper* can draw our spiritual eyes in the same direction.

May Drost (mdrost1@cogeco.ca) is a retired teacher of English who lives in Sarnia, Ont.

Does Pope Francis represent good news?



Bert Witvoet

Pope Francis has surprised a lot of people. He seems genuinely humble, and he is alleged to have a heart for the poor. His quiet, down-to-earth manner shows a person with strong inner convictions who marches to his own drum – well, perhaps to the drum of the Spirit. This bodes well for the Catholic Church, and it may well bring a lot of people back to the Gospel of peace.

But inner piety and humility at the level of the papacy is not enough to turn things around for the Catholic Church. The more I reflect on how the church is structured and what it teaches, the more I see a huge gap between what it claims to be and what it actually is. Don't misunderstand me. I am not suggesting that there is not a lot to like about Catholicism, nor that Protestant churches are better than the Catholic Church. I am not interested in comparative analysis.

In a way I am somewhat attracted to the idea that all churches should join the Catholic Church again so that we can have a common witness to the world out there. I hate the splintering of the Christian church. But I write about the failures of the Catholic Church to keep myself from giving in to a kind of romanticism awakened by the very humility of this new pope. Who wouldn't want to have this man give leadership to her own church denomination?

Two failings

One of the first things the new pope did in Rome was pray at the St. Mary Major Basilica and at the tomb of St. Peter. These very acts bring out two crucial Catholic doctrines that indicate a huge chasm between Protestantism and Catholicism. And I truly believe that the burden of proof lies with the Catholic Church. What justifies this veneration of Mary, who, according to Catholic teachings, remained a virgin for life, was granted a sinless state, ascended into heaven and can stand between believers and Christ as a mediatrix? Some of this is based on the supposed intercessory role she played



Pope Francis prays inside St. Mary Major Basilica in Rome.

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Letters

Third generation pride

After an excellent introduction in "Lean on God" (March 11, 2013), Nick Loenen makes the observation that there was little humility shown when trying to establish society on Christian principles. Strange that my dad wrote that he found Dr. Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd very humble in the 1920s, while he found third generation Reformers less so in the 1970s.

Loenen also made the observation that the concept of Christ's rule of the whole world

became suddenly undone in the 1960s. I believe it had its roots during the war, when one could not trust those sitting beside you in church. Close friends belonged to other denominations, or none at all.

Each generation has to find its way, to try and listen to God. To me, the generation of leaders in the 1960s in Holland seemed to have failed, by and large.

August Guillaume
Edmonton, AB

Science as idol

I'm disappointed in Rudy Eikelboom's article "Leading Like Daniel: Calvin's Haarsma new President of BioLogos" (March 25, 2013). Daniel refused to bow down to an idol, whereas BioLogos requires people to bow before science. Daniel went to the lions and was steadfast in his faith, refusing compromise. Comparing Daniel with Haarsma is very far-fetched, to say the least!

BioLogos is clear: science (nature) and the bible are two revelations and where they conflict there needs to be reinterpretation. However, the starting point for the scientists at BioLogos is theistic evolution. There is no consideration of creationism. There is no thought that perhaps secular scientists and their agenda of evolution have infected our interpretation of the Bible and the clear teaching of the word of God.

Why wouldn't Christians want the Bible

to be true? Why wouldn't Christians strive to uphold the clear teaching of the Bible? BioLogos itself fudges on whether or not there is a historical Adam. If Adam did not exist, or if death and cancer and carnivores existed before Adam's fall into sin, then the big question is: to what will God restore creation?

Will the new creation have sin, and death, and cancer because "pre-Adam" there was sin and death and cancer? Romans 5:12ff is very clear, that sin entered the world through one man, the first Adam, therefore we need Christ, through whom righteousness and life are given.

BioLogos is not as attentive to its theology as it is to the idol of "science." Their own website explains that Paul merely had a first century, therefore limited, view of such things. Here the very notion of divine inspiration is blown away.

Richard T. Vander Vaart
Sarnia, ON

Does Pope Francis represent good news? *continued*

when Jesus turned water into wine; some of it was reasoned out to make it possible for Jesus to be born sinless. But all of it has little or no biblical basis.

Then there is the Petrine doctrine, which elevates every pope to the position of successor to Peter, considered to be the first pope. Which means that the Church of Christ is built on the Apostle Peter, not on the confession he made when he acknowledged Jesus as the Christ, the anointed Messiah. We know that at one point the Apostle Paul rebuked Peter for not eating with uncircumcised Christians. St. Jerome, back in the fourth century, downplayed this dispute by saying that Peter and Paul were just play-acting a difference to help their followers understand. But St. Augustine disagreed with him and acknowledged the dispute between the two apostles, a dispute that somewhat tarnished Peter's reputation as the first "Pope," especially in the light of a pope's presumed infallibility.

Further concerns

Along with these two teachings about Mary and Peter there are many other issues that make me reject the Catholic Church as my proper church home. The celibacy requirement for priests makes it terribly difficult for those who don't have the gift for this state to remain pure and not fall prey to improper sexual relationships. We know that priests were allowed to be married the first thousand years of the church's existence. Why this celibacy requirement on the part of the Catholic Church in the second century? According to a former Dutch priest, seminarians were encouraged to think of Mary as their lover.

Then there is the sacramentalism in the Catholic faith, creating the impression that one can achieve a state of grace by fulfilling the prescribed obligations of being a good Catholic. Going to mass is almost a magic spiritual bullet. Catholic theologians will argue that genuine faith in Christ is needed, but the hierarchical structure of the church, the declared consecrating powers of the priests that turn bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Jesus and the necessity of being administered last rites, for example, to escape damnation from mortal sins bring that contention into question.

What makes all this such a thorny issue between the Catholic Church and Protestant churches is the declared infallibility of the Pope when he speaks *ex cathedra*. This pretty much freezes teachings that have been declared eternally valid by any one of the popes. How can someone like Pope Francis change any of these doctrines if he were so inclined? The only possibility is that the doctrine of infallibility be declared no longer valid. ✕

Bert Witvoet is indebted to Garry Willis's book Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit for helpful information on Catholic teachings and practices. He and Alice live in St. Catharines, Ont.

Remembering a learned and faithful writer

Bert Witvoet

Gijsbert Gerrit den Boggende, or Bert, as he was known to everyone, was born on Jan. 11, 1943 in Woerden, the Netherlands. He passed away unexpectedly March 18, 2013, at his home in Brooks, Alberta.

Bert den Boggende was one of us. By "one of us" I mean that throughout the years he wrote numerous articles for *Christian Courier*, and if he took a respite from that, readers could often find him on the letters-to-the-editor page, correcting a writer's wrong data, illogical conclusion or unbiblical thinking. Not that Bert was a negative person, but he knew too much to keep quiet. He was, above all, a lover of the truth.

Our current Editor, Angela Reitsma Bick, sometimes joked that she should hire him as her fact-checker. She writes, "He frequently caught errors both large and small – typos, yes, but also inaccurate historical assumptions in news articles, most recently one about a church in Russia."

But by "one of us" I also mean that he was a child of God with a thoroughly Reformed perspective. His profound intelligence was not a badge of superiority, but a gift that he needed to use, "to please therewith his Maker." For this reason, readers were enriched by learned articles about the views of Abraham Kuyper, the history of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Papal encyclicals, what came before the King James Version of the Bible, the various movements within Islam.

But Bert was also passionate about art and its history, as was evident from his excellent article about Vincent van Gogh in the March 25 issue of *CC*. In fact, he had studied van Gogh and Gauguin for his Master's degree in art history. According to his pastor, Martin Boardman, his home was filled with Bert's own paintings.

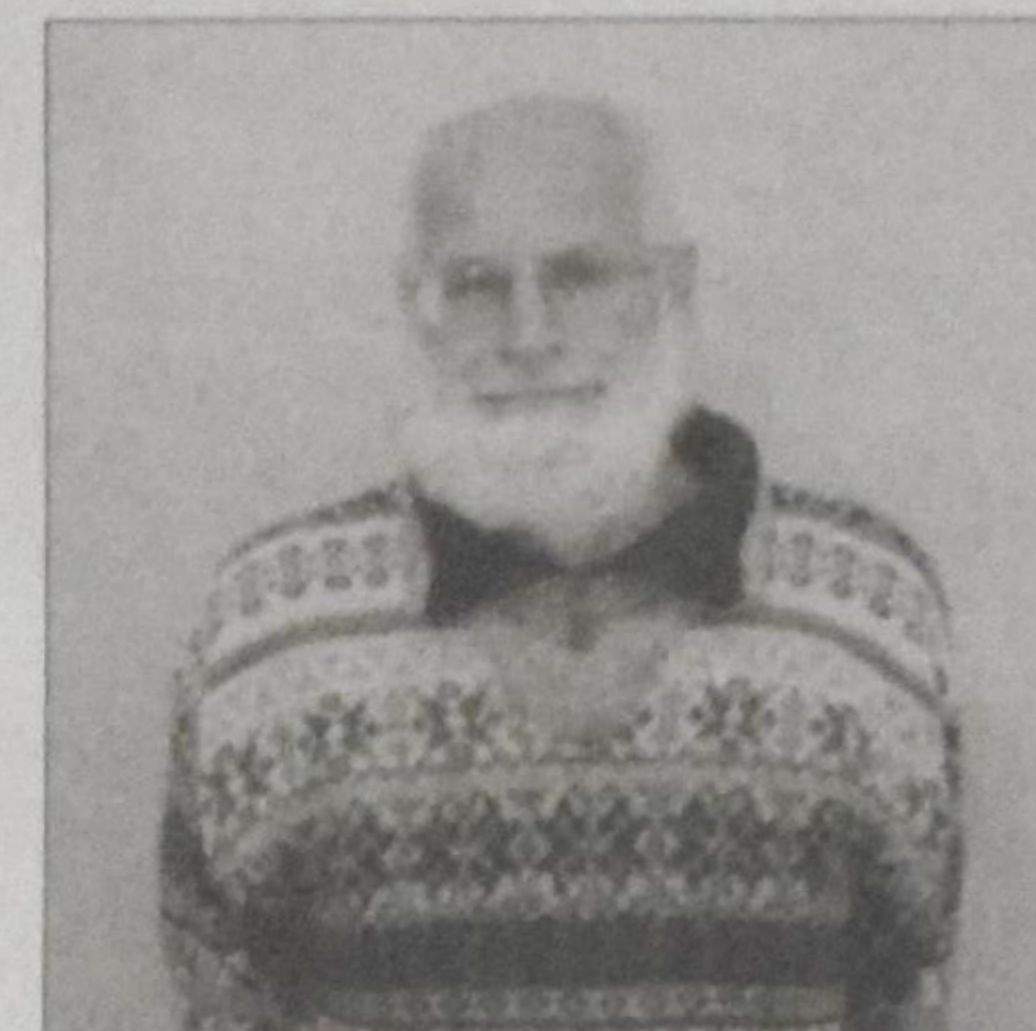
Features Editor, Cathy Smith, would sometimes encourage Bert to be more personal, to offer a speculative opinion. "He would not go there," she writes. "Early on in our relationship he took me to task for trying to cut his articles down in terms of word count. He didn't agree with that. When I suggested that readers aren't so interested in longish articles anymore, he said that we shouldn't cater to that prevailing cultural shallowness."

What else can one expect from a man who received the equivalent of a B.A. degree in the Netherlands, added to that in Canada a B.A. degree from Queen's University, a Master of Arts degree from the University of British Columbia, a Master in Christian Studies from Regent College and a Ph.D. degree from McMaster University, the last based on a study of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Britain during the period 1914-1945.

Bert's pastor remembers him as a quiet man, "who lived a relatively simple and quiet lifestyle. But certainly not isolated. He was well known in the Brooks community, through his involvement as a supply teacher and in a number of different choirs in the area. He enjoyed singing bass and was well liked by the choir directors and fellow choir members."

Pastor Boardman quotes Psalm 1 to compare Bert to "a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." Bert is survived by four sisters and two brothers and their children and grandchildren. His nephew Rick Swagerman writes that all members of the family were always remembered by Bert on their birthdays and anniversaries. A memorial service was held on April 20 in the Brooks Christian Reformed Church.

We at *Christian Courier* will dearly miss this brother's voice. ✕



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News

CRC Friendship ministries director dies



Marian Van Til, with files from CRCNA, Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS, Michigan – Woodstock, Ont. native Nella Uitvlugt, the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church's Friendship Ministries for people with developmental disabilities, died suddenly on the evening of March 20. No cause of death was revealed.

The funeral was held on March 25 at the Plymouth Heights CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Uitvlugt, 60, is survived by her husband, Eric, three adult children and their families, and extended family.

Uitvlugt was the executive director of Friendship for half of the 30 years the organization has existed. Friendship Ministries now works with 75 denominations in 28 countries providing educational materials for churches that want to help people with developmental disabilities to be brought more fully into the lives their congregations. At Friendship group meetings disabled members learn songs, Bible stories and get a feel for the way church works so they're comfortable when they attend on Sundays.

Uitvlugt traveled often across Canada and the U.S., speaking about Friendship to groups and churches. She had a degree in special education from Calvin College, led a Friendship program in her own church, was past president of the Religion and Spirituality Division of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, was a leader in the National Council of Churches in



Uitvlugt advocated tirelessly for people who have disabilities.

Christ Committee on Disabilities and was an advisory committee member of the CRC's Disability Concerns ministry.

"Nella was a trusted advisor for me and for the ministry of ministry of Disability Concerns," says Mark Stephenson, director of CRC Disability Concerns. "She had so much wisdom, and advocated tirelessly for people who have disabilities through her work at Friendship, her speaking engagements, and her many contacts throughout the world."

Friendship Ministries materials can be purchased from Faith Alive Christian Resources, the CRC's publishing arm (faithaliveresources.org).

Quebec professor, Planned Parenthood deride 'biased' pregnancy help centres

MONTREAL (LifeSiteNews.com) – A professor from the University of Quebec in Montreal has joined forces with the Quebec Federation of Planned Parenthood (FQPN) in an attack against the province's pro-life pregnancy help centres. Dr. Audrey Gonin from the university's School of Social Work told reporters that the province's pregnancy help centres are giving out "biased information to their customers."

Gonin said that some women have been told that abortion can lead to breast cancer and cause "post-abortion syndrome," positions she says contradict the province's National Institute of Public Health.

Gonin and the FQPN want pregnant women who visit one of Quebec's 30 pregnancy centres to contact them with evidence of biased counseling. "We call on all people in connection with a pregnancy who visit a support centre that clearly sought to dissuade them from considering the option of abortion to contact us."

Georges Buscemi, president of Campagne Québec-Vie, says out that while Gonin and the FQPN claim to be advocating for women, their "real agenda" is to provide women with immediate information on and access to abortion services. The FQPN and other abortion providers "abort children as quickly as pos-



Crisis pregnancy centres accused of dissuading women from choosing abortion.



Prof. Gonin.

sible and, above all, fight volunteers and organizations who give their time to help support pregnant women in difficulty," he says, adding that the FQPN will not "lift a finger to provide assistance to women in need, but it is at the forefront to demand that we can kill these children as soon as possible."

Facts confirm help centres' views

Pro-life groups have pointed out that the abortion industry's grounds for attack can be easily refuted.

There is, in fact, a link between abortion and breast cancer. Prominent biologist and endocrinologist Joel Brind discovered in his analysis of numerous studies in 1996 and 2005 that "an abortion elevates a woman's overall risk of developing breast cancer by 30 percent" and that the "results were 'remarkably consistent' across population, ethnic, dietary, socioeconomic, and lifestyle factors." In addition, abortion does cause emotional trauma. A growing number of organizations offering help to post-abortive women indicate that many are hurting both physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Gay rights, civil rights not the same, say most black Americans

WASHINGTON, D.C. (LifeSiteNews.com) – By a two-to-one margin, a new poll reveals that black Americans reject the notion that homosexual rights compare with the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and '60s. Only 28 percent of respondents said they believe "gay rights" and civil rights are the same. This, despite the gay "marriage" endorsement by prominent black leaders, including U.S. President Obama.

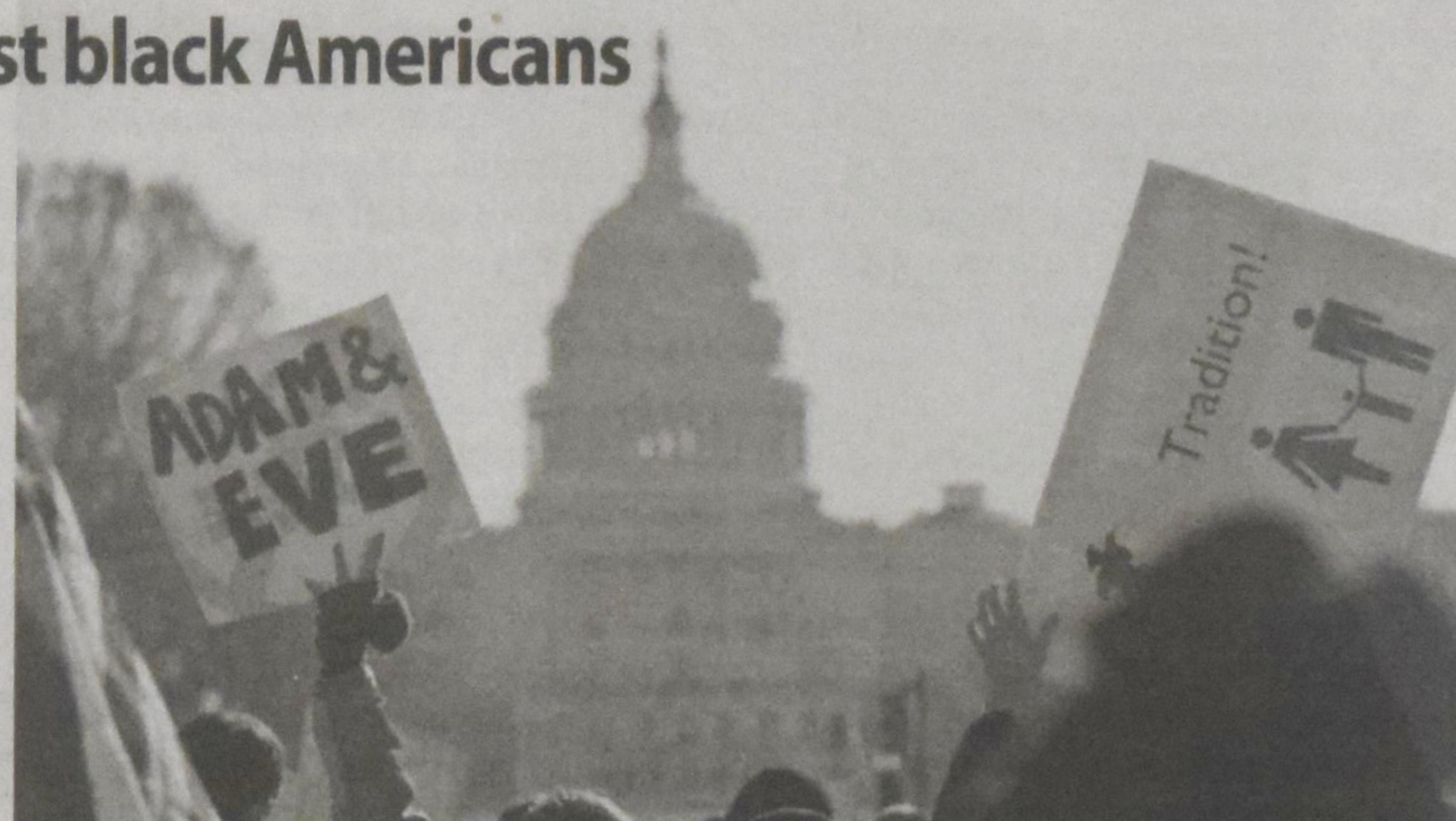
The poll was commissioned by Robert Johnson, the founder of Black Entertainment Television (BET), a cable TV network aimed at a primarily black audience.

Some of the attendees of the recent March for Marriage (who gathered outside the U.S. Supreme Court building while the court discussed gay "marriage") talked about the reasons blacks take umbrage at equating marriage "equality" and gay rights

with their own history. "It really saddens me and a lot of African-Americans, because definitely, there is no comparison to be made there," a woman told John Ritchie of the Catholic group TFP. "I just don't like the comparison, because to me there is absolutely none."

Another march attendee asserted, "Homosexuals weren't put in chains for 400 years. There's no equality there. They're trying to equate unnatural behaviour with natural behaviour."

Former Alabama Congressman Artur Davis has also noted that homosexuals do not share blacks' history of enslavement, Jim Crow and violent discrimination. "When you say to African-Americans, 'The gay struggle is the black struggle,' they don't buy it," said Davis, a centrist Democrat who now identifies as a Republican.



Members of a recent March for Marriage in Washington don't agree that "the gay struggle is the black struggle."

"What African-Americans often don't like is when they're told, 'If you don't agree with gay marriage, you're a bigot.' Or,

'How dare you take this position when at one point, blacks and whites weren't allowed to marry in some states?'"

News

Pakistan: After eight years in prison, blasphemy death sentence against Christian man is lifted

LAHORE, Pakistan (Agenzia Fides) – A Christian man sentenced to death on false blasphemy charges, and imprisoned since 2005, was finally acquitted on April 3 by the High Court of Lahore.

A panel of three judges said Younis Masih is innocent and ordered his immediate release. The judges accepted in full the request of the defense, reversed the judgment of the Court of First Instance and annulled the death sentence against Masih. However, they imposed against him a fine of 100,000 rupees.

Masih's appeal was presented last September (2012) thanks to a team of Christian lawyers and the support of the Legal Evangelical Association Development. The



Masih: finally free.

trial was followed by many Muslims, a number of whom were present at the recent reading of the verdict.

"We are grateful to God that, after so many years, justice has triumphed for Younis Masih," said Masih's lawyer. "We are confident that the same thing can also happen for Asia Bibi." Bibi is a 32-year-old wife and mother and convert from Islam who gained international attention when she was charged with blasphemy in 2009. (The Governor of Punjab, who investigated on behalf of President Zardari, said Bibi is likely to be pardoned if the High Court does not suspend the sentence. However, the local imam and his congregation have threatened to "take the law into their own hands" if that happens.)

Younis Masih was arrested on charges of blasphemy in Lahore on Sept. 10, 2005. He was then 27 years old. The catalyst for the blasphemy charge was an attack by 400 Muslims armed with sticks who plundered the district of Chungi Amer Sidhu where Younis' family lived. Younis and his wife, Meena, were beaten, and more than 100 Christian

families fled the area to save their lives.

The incident began when Younis asked some Muslim neighbours to turn down the volume of music coming from their home. They reacted against him, got others involved and called on fellow Muslims to attack and burn homes of Christians. To appease the crowd, police registered a complaint of blasphemy against Younis. He finally had a trial in 2007, held in prison for security reasons, when a Court of First Instance sentenced him to death. ➤

Former Church of England head: British PM feeds fears of sidelining Christians

LONDON (TCI) – British Christians who fear being marginalized are having their anxieties fed by Prime Minister David Cameron, says the former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey.

Writing in the national newspaper the *Daily Mail*, Lord Carey warned that the government is "aiding and abetting" a hostile secularization "every step of the way." Carey also warned of an "aggressive secularist and relativist approach" behind the plans to "change the nature of marriage."

Lord Carey's comments came as a survey showed that more than two thirds of Christians feel they are part of a "persecuted minority" in Britain.

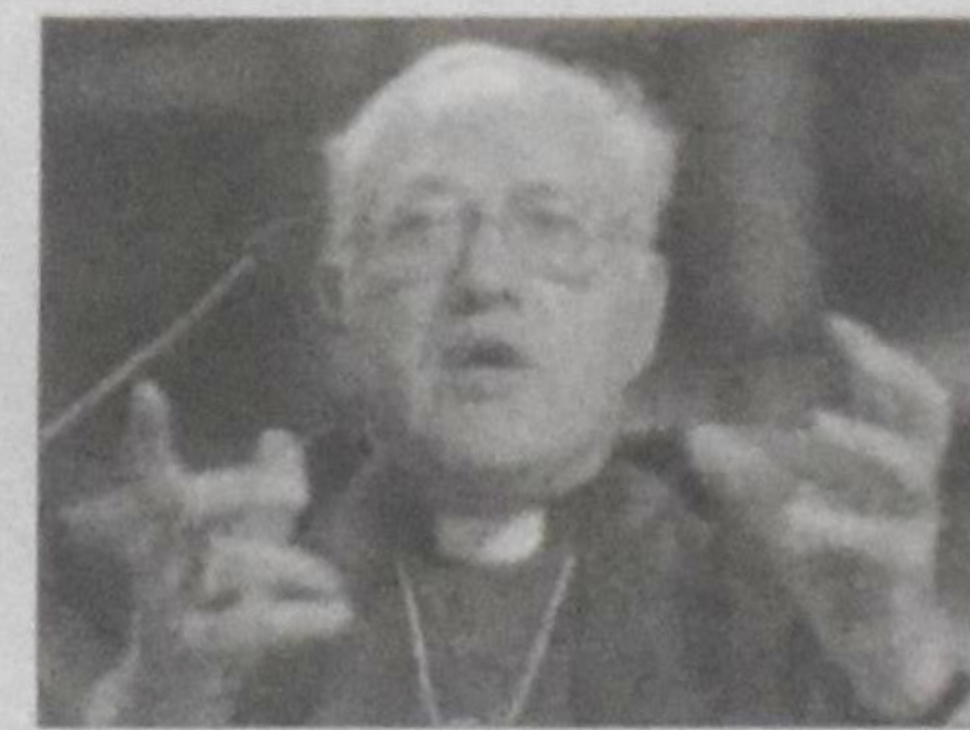
Commenting on the poll, Lord Carey said, "Their fears may be exaggerated because few in the UK are actually persecuted, but the Prime Minister has done more than any other recent political leader to feed these anxieties. He seems to have forgotten, in spite of his oft-repeated support for the right of Christians to wear the cross, that lawyers acting for the Coalition argued only months ago in the Strasbourg court that those sacked for wearing a cross against their employer's wishes should simply get another job."

Lord Carey, who was the Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1990s, also strongly criticized plans to introduce same-sex marriage, warning that that would risk "alienating" many. He said, "As David Cameron knows, I am very suspicious that behind the plans to change the nature of marriage, which come

before the House of Lords soon, there lurks an aggressive secularist and relativist approach towards an institution that has glued society together for time immemorial."

Carey, continued, "By dividing marriage into religious and civil the government threatens the church and state link which they purport to support. But they also threaten to empty marriage of its fundamental religious and civic meaning as an institution orientated towards the upbringing of children."

Lord Carey also warned of a lack of protection for registrars and teachers in the same-sex marriage legislation. He concluded, "The danger, I believe, that the government is courting with its approach both to marriage and religious freedom, is the alienation of a large minority of people who only a few years ago would have been considered pillars of society." ➤



Lord Carey warns British PM against alienating "pillars of society."

John Piper retires from pastorate, will focus on Internet ministry, writing, speaking

Marian Van Til, with files from *Desiring God*, *Christianity Today*

MINNEAPOLIS, Minnesota – Over the 33 years that South Carolina native John Piper was the senior pastor and pastor of preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, his unique approach to theology and the Bible as a "Reformed Baptist" increasingly set him apart.

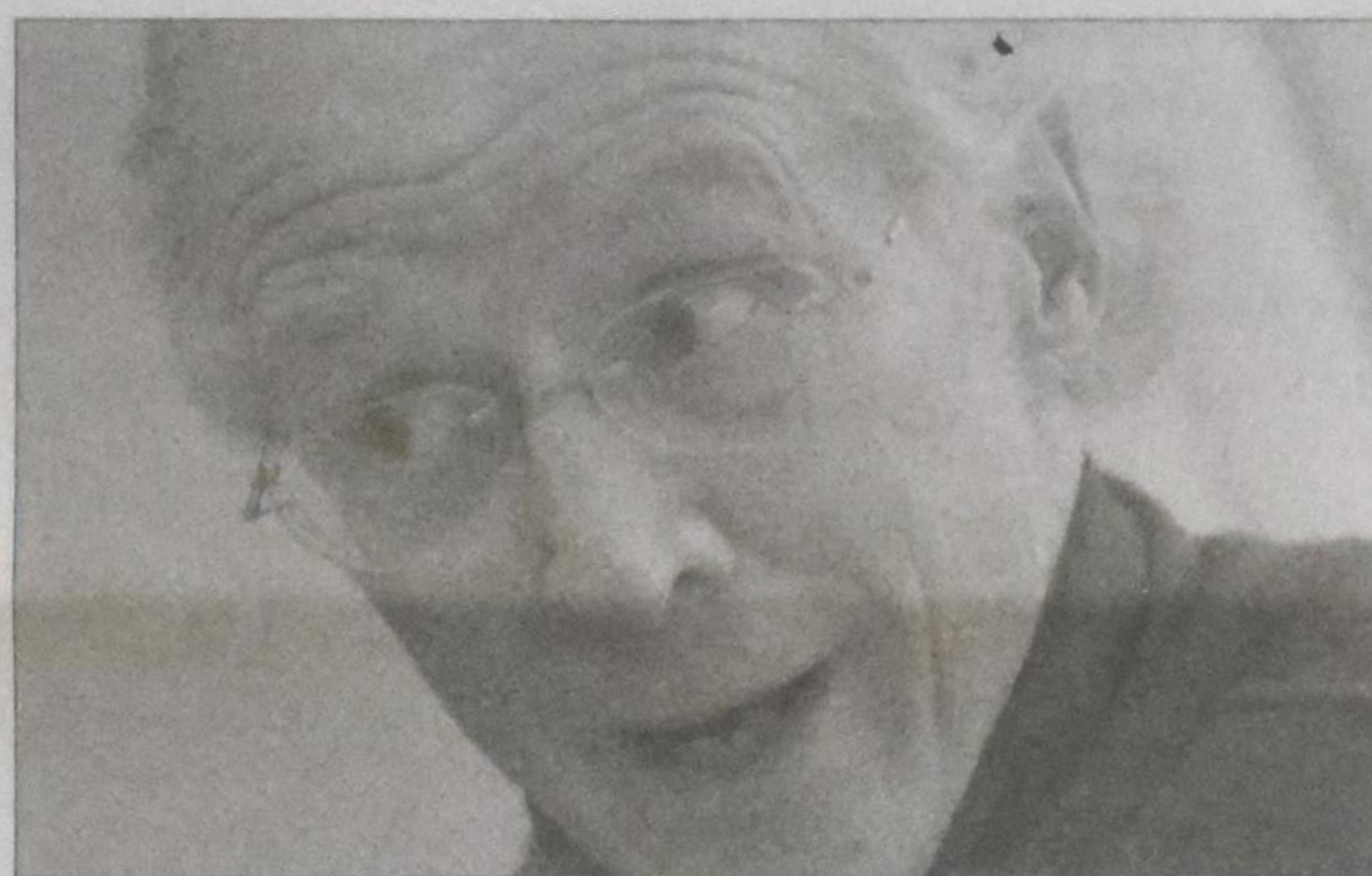
When he arrived at Bethlehem the church had several hundred elderly members. It currently has 5,000 members of all ages and is now in the heart of one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the U.S. The church also runs Bethlehem College and Seminary.

Piper's unique brand of Reformedness began to gain him a worldwide audience once his many book and countless sermons and other Christian resources began to be available at low- or no-cost on the Internet through his ministry *Desiring God* (desiringGod.org). Piper became known for what he calls "Christian hedonism," with the motto, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him." That theme is also the origin of the ministry name, *Desiring God*.

While maintaining certain Baptist doctrines, foremost among them adult baptism, Piper has sometimes been described as "more Calvinist than the Calvinists" – i.e., the Calvinists in Reformed churches. He has a typically Calvinist high view of Scripture and is especially well-known for his emphasis in writings and preaching on the meaning and implications of the sovereignty of God. He has written books about John Calvin, the 18th century Puritan preacher-theologian Jonathan Edwards, the Calvinist poet-hymnodist William Cooper and others of similar worldview.

Looking to a 'new season' of life, ministry

In a recent *Desiring God* blog post, Bethlehem elder and staff member David Mathis wrote, "It's the end of an era – the era of Piper as local-church pastor – but God willing, just the beginning of a new season of ministry. It



Piper begins a "new season of ministry," not stereotypical retirement.

has been extraordinary to watch a people once seemingly reticent to let go of their beloved, long-time pastor become the happy commissioners of Piper into a new season of life and ministry."

Mathis said Piper now plans "to invest his writing and speaking energies mainly as founder and teacher of *desiringGod.org*, as well as continuing as chancellor of Bethlehem College and Seminary." Piper's successor at Bethlehem as "pastor for preaching and vision" is Jason Meyer. Meyer grew up in rural South Dakota and was nurtured in the local Reformed church there.

In Piper's own blog post called "First Day Thoughts on Not Being a Pastor Anymore," he wrote, "Finishing the ministry at Bethlehem has been deeply and painfully satisfying. Painfully, because of long, tearful embraces with people who don't want to let go. But here I want to show you how finishing can be so satisfying. . . ."

Piper concluded his post saying, "As I woke up on this Monday morning for the first time in 33 years without the official mantle of pastor, the only tears that came were tears of thankfulness. And under them was a great joy. It is finished. It has a completeness to it. God started it. God sustained it. God ended it. And I have loved it. And I love looking back on it, complete. Imperfect in a hundred ways, but not because it was too long or too short. Being Bethlehem's pastor has been my life. But now it is finished. And I am thrilled at what lies ahead – for her and for me. Especially in a thousand years." ➤



Column

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith



'The better story'



ThinkChristian's Josh Larsen was critical in his review of *Life of Pi*. Lamenting that "God" is hardly present in the film, that "there's nothing of substance about faith of any kind," he dismisses it as a "movie that wants you to believe in little more than . . . belief." It lacks, he says, "even the conviction of syncretism."

In the film, an author listens to shipwreck survivor Pi Patel tell the story of his voyage on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker, a story, it is said, that "will make you believe in God." Given such an extravagant claim, Larsen's high expectations are fair. But, respectfully, I think his review missed the mark.

Here's what I saw: a fiercely intelligent fable that pits a "decadently rationalistic" culture, to borrow Marilynne Robinson's phrase, against a universal God-hunger, that uniquely human compulsion to believe in something that can't be proven. In *Life of Pi* religion is accurately and, one might even argue, lovingly particularized, Hinduism giving Pi "faith," Christianity, "love," and Islam, "holy ground, serenity and brotherhood."

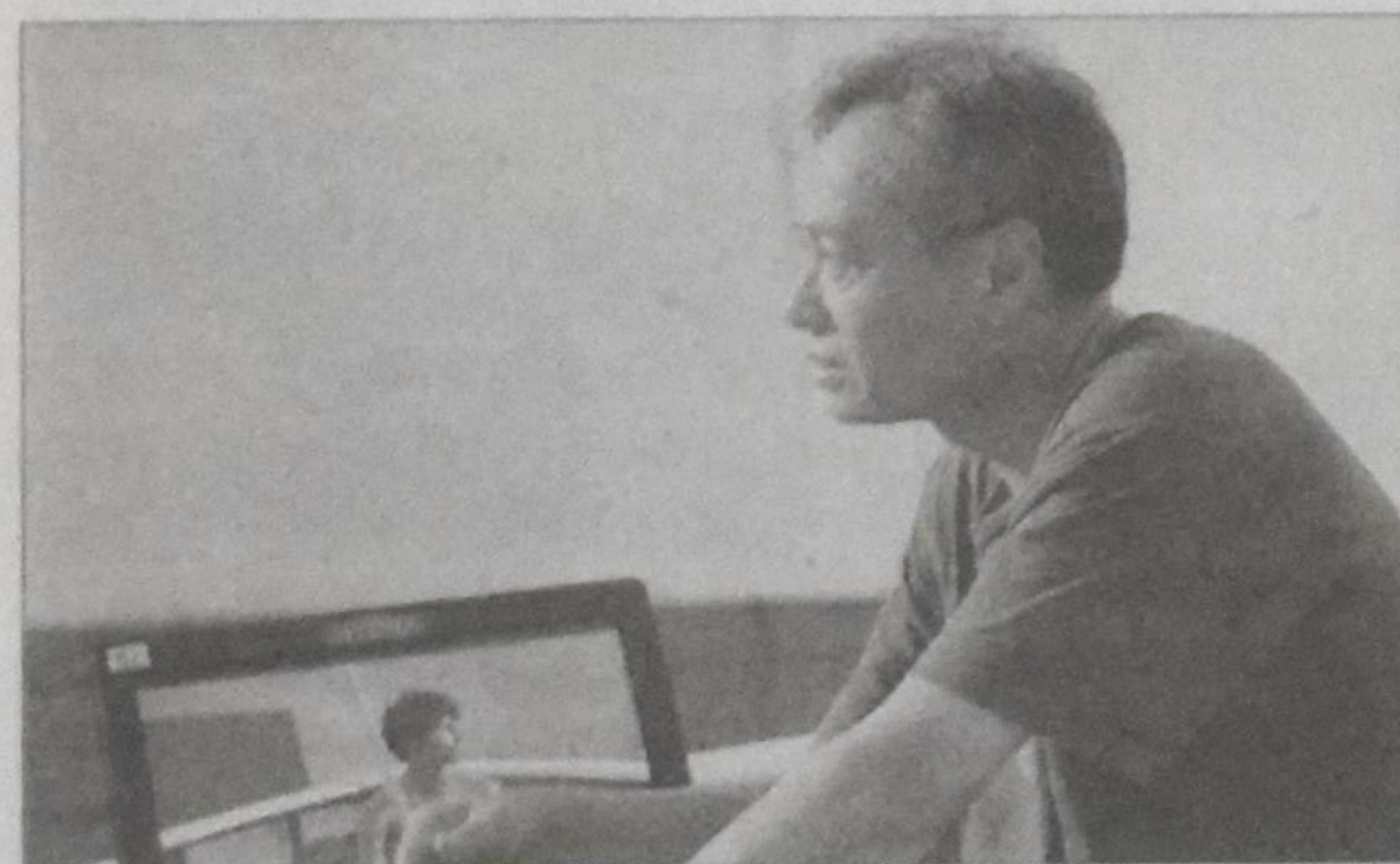
In director Ang Lee's strict adaptation of Yann Martel's novel, the word "God" expands, not in a syncretic way, but metaphorically, poetic shorthand for the spiritual, artistic and imaginative dimensions of life. Both the book and the film revel in the palpable sacredness permeating creation, the "divine consciousness" and "moral exaltation" (*Life of Pi*, p. 63) celebrated by the religions of the world, a transcendence denied by doubt, which Pi calls "a philosophy of life akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation" (p. 28).

Pi endures an epic ordeal of Noahic proportions. He finds a manual tucked away in his lifeboat. It recommends three strategies to stave off despair – community singing (a sure-fire way to lift the spirits), telling stories and holding on to hope. Why does Pi collect religions? The answer is found in that distilled list: religious life – lived communally, nourishing the imagination, offering redemptive context – defends against nihilism.

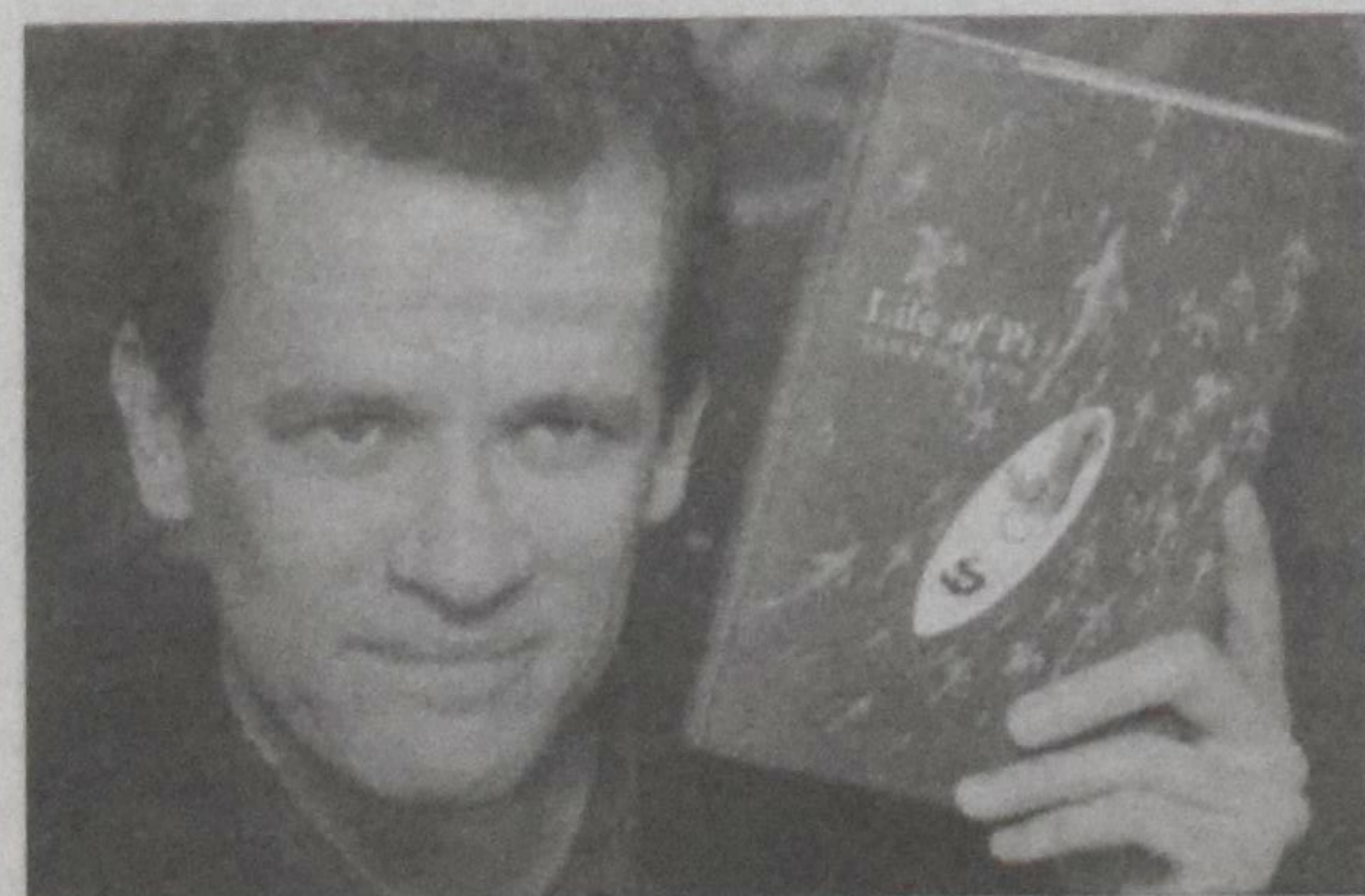
When the author is told an alternate version of the tale, with no reference to God, he recognizes it as an empty shell. Its coldly enumerated facts, including murder and cannibalism, are acceptable to the Japanese insurance agents who want to categorize the shipwreck in an "understandable" way. But the author agrees with Pi. The version with God is "the better story." "Even if I can't prove it," muses Pi.



Pi wrestles with, then surrenders to, God on the raft.



Director Ang Lee has crafted an elegant 3-D argument for multiple realities.



Author Martel calls the movie "deceptively complicated."

Layer upon layer

If the story makes you believe in God, it will also make you believe you have a soul. As a child, Pi looks into the limpid eyes of the ferocious tiger and claims he sees a soul. His pragmatic father, who sides with reason and science, lectures his son, "The tiger is not your friend. When you look into his eyes, you see your own emotions looking back at you." There's the atheist's snub: religion as coping mechanism for a threatening reality, religion as lullaby.

In the final scenes, however, we learn that Richard Parker is a symbol for Pi himself. Suddenly the ocean journey reveals a quest of self-discovery. Who is right about the tiger . . . Pi or his father? Does he have a soul? Pi wrestles with God on the raft, screaming, "I've lost everything. I surrender. What more do you want?" He begs God: "Whatever comes, I want to know. . . ."

Pi's soul, if he has one, is tarnished. At one point he asks Richard Parker, "What are you looking at? What do you see?" Gazing into the tiger's eyes, Pi observes a kaleidoscope of images, both good and evil, pictures that swirl from minute strands of DNA to infinite expanses of space. Coupled with his name, an "irrational number that goes on forever," the images imply that Pi does have a soul. He matters to God.

Pi insists that he was triumphant in the end *only* because of Richard Parker: "I couldn't live without him." Caring for the tiger sparked his inventiveness, forced him to ponder the big questions and, ultimately, compelled him to love the animal. To love himself. The inference prompts a sly question: "If you can love yourself, can you also love your neighbour?" Even your neighbour of a different faith? Who *also* has a soul?

A *Maclean's* article (Nov. 2012) provides a clue from Martel himself: "It's a deceptively complicated movie," says Martel, noting that the denouement's twist goes by so fast, "if you blink, you might think it's just the story of a castaway boy."

Introducing hope

Unlike Larsen, I find the movie to be a remarkable achievement. As the film opens, a prone figure, his back to us, watches the activity at the Patel zoo. The shadowy silhouette is introduced so subtly, you might not even notice him. Who is this? Maybe it's Pi. Maybe it's God.

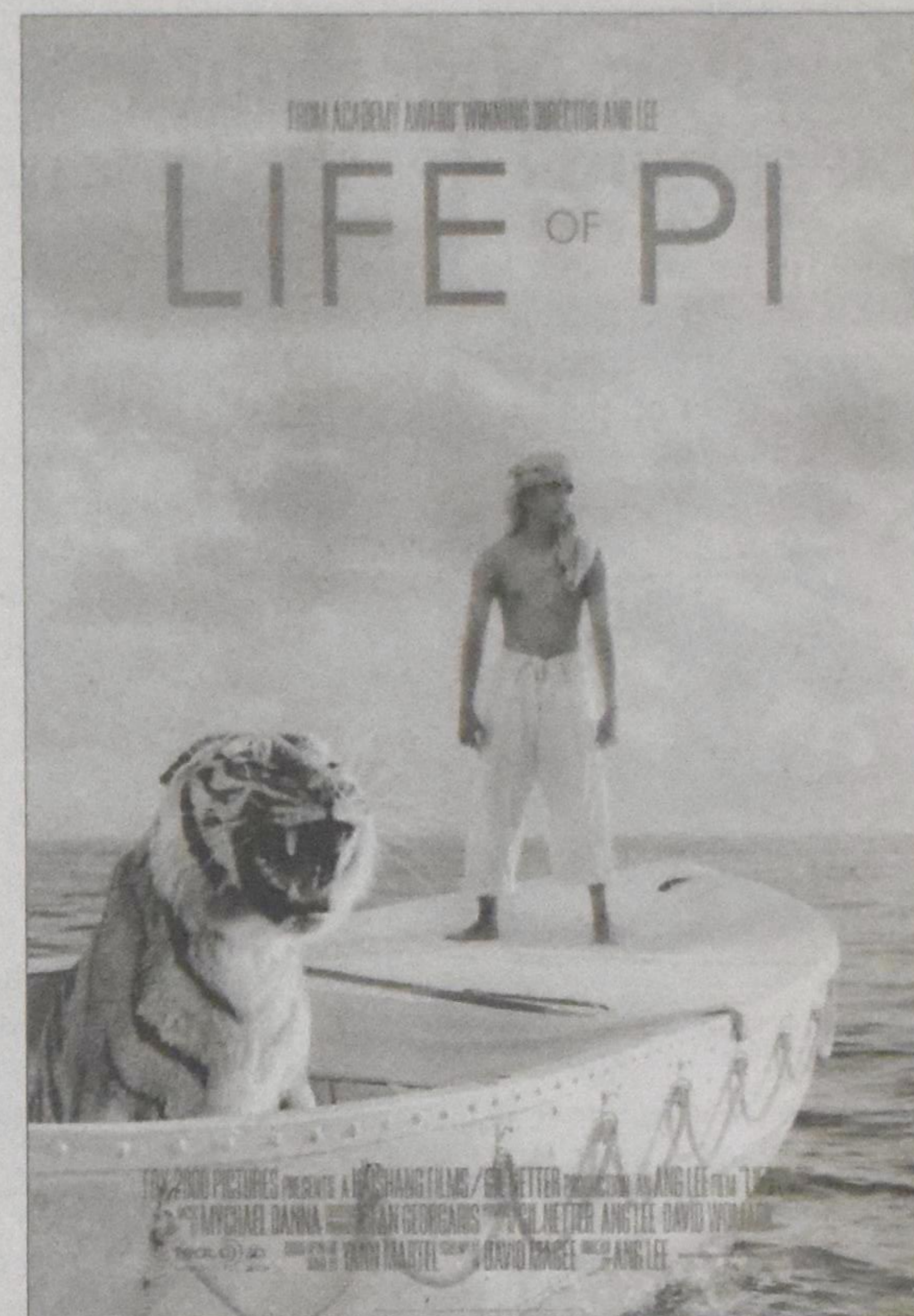
Later we see Pi's uncle preparing to dive into a clear pool. It seems real. Then the water breaks into ripples and we realize that we've been looking at a reflection. It's another subtle and powerfully suggestive moment. Some people trust facts and figures, data that can be tested in the lab, like the Japanese agents who say, "We believe what we see" (*Life of Pi*, p. 294). But what is real, after all? Pi's interrogators don't believe it, because they can't find it on their maps, but maybe, just maybe, as Pi claims, there *is* an algae island arched by a rainbow, a place where evil exists, but where God is watching and sometimes intervening. Where there is hope.

In her book *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendour of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World*, Marva Dawn describes postmodern despair: "[...] there is no such thing as truth except what you create for yourself; there is no meaning to life; all is random; everything is mistrusted (the philosophers would say deconstructed) since it is all a power play; there is no story that is universally true; you only go around once so do it with gusto" (p. 249). Since we've jettisoned the meta-narrative that gave our culture meaningful structure in the past, we're obliged now to start at the very beginning once again: belief.

Larsen is right. *Life of Pi* is about belief. In the novel the interviewers find the story "hard to believe" and Pi takes them to task: "If you stumble at mere believability, what are you living for? [...] Love is hard to believe, ask any lover. Life is hard to believe, ask any scientist. God is hard to believe, ask any believer" (p. 297). Confronting the negativism of postmodernity, both the book and the film come down on the side of belief, inviting re-engagement in a rooted story, feeding the God-hunger.

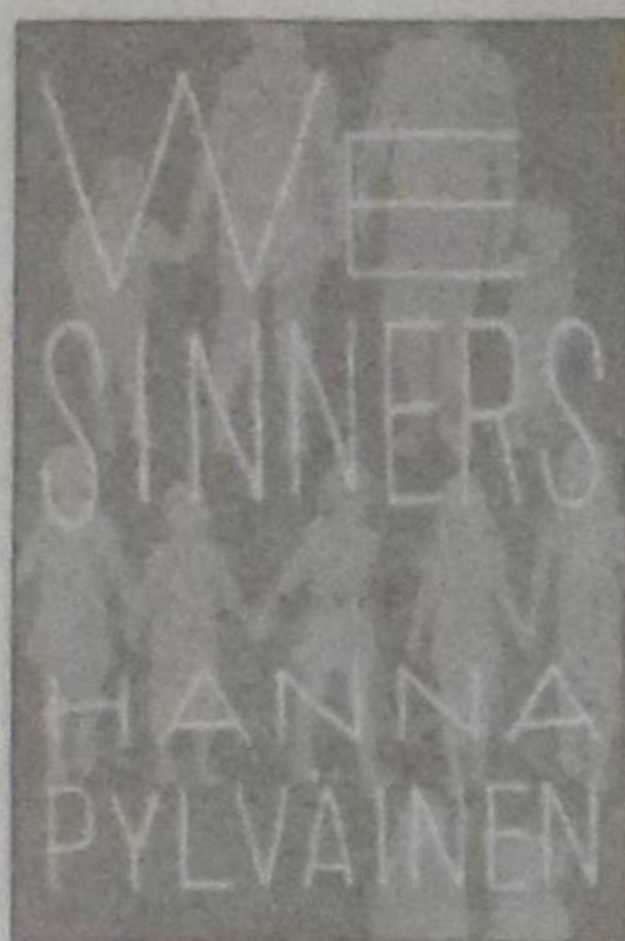
Larsen's also right when he notes that many movies blend "faithy" elements indiscriminately, engineering a "lowest common denominator" spirituality that can't be identified too particularly or embraced too tightly. *Life of Pi* doesn't do that. It's a cinematic diorama, an elegant 3-D argument for multiple dimensions of reality, an artistic work exemplifying that every creative act is an act of faith, every human being made in the image of God, and rejecting the "dry, yeastless factuality" of the reasonable agnostic, who, to the very end, will "lack imagination and miss the better story" (p. 64).

Cathy Smith is Features Editor with Christian Courier. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.



This fiercely intelligent fable pits a rationalistic culture against a universal God-hunger.

Reviews

**We Sinners**

Hanna Pylväinen
Henry Holt and Co.
(2012) 208 p.

Do I believe on your behalf?

New novel on how family life (mis)shapes faith

Brian Bork

In her first novel, *We Sinners*, Hanna Pylväinen tells the story of the Rovaniemis, a family bound by ethnicity and immigration patterns to a minor Protestant religious tradition. They're Michigan residents, too. Sound familiar?

I hope not, because the Rovaniemis' story isn't a happy one. It's hard to capture even a fleeting glimpse of joy in this recollection of the dissolution of the Rovaniemi family, an account deeply rooted in Pylväinen's own experience. There are nine children in the clan, and Pylväinen gives each child a chapter, detailing the ways in which they reject the faith of their parents, or struggle to find some sort of genuine connection to what they've inherited.

What they've inherited is Laestadianism, a fringe offshoot of the Lutheran tradition born in the obdurate darkness of an 18th century Finnish winter. It's essentially a reactionary faith, initially gaining popularity as a safe harbour from the ravages of alcoholism. By the time it's imported to the Midwest, its adherents have found plenty more to react against: dancing, of course, but green nail polish, too. Even a small black and white television, which, on occasion, the Rovaniemis stare at like "third-world refugees." Entering the confines of the tradition initially seems quite easy; simply "ask your sins forgiven," and it's welcome aboard. Yet the characters don't seem to experience that oceanic sense of relief that ought to accompany forgiveness. It's a rather heartless setup, after all: "no one said they loved Jesus, no one was overemotional, and God was less a personal friend than someone spoken of quietly, as if in fear of disturbing Him."

Freed from nothing

If there's any warmth to be found here, it's in the empathy that Pylväinen clearly has for her characters. In these "escape from fundamentalism" sort of stories, it's easy to portray the deconversion as something completely liberating, a secular "I was blind, but now I see" epiphany. Pylväinen, to the contrary, describes in heartbreaking detail the staggering sense of isolation that the Rovaniemi children feel as they leave the flock. "Freed from nothing, liberated from nothing," reflects one of the daughters, after running away from her jerk athe-



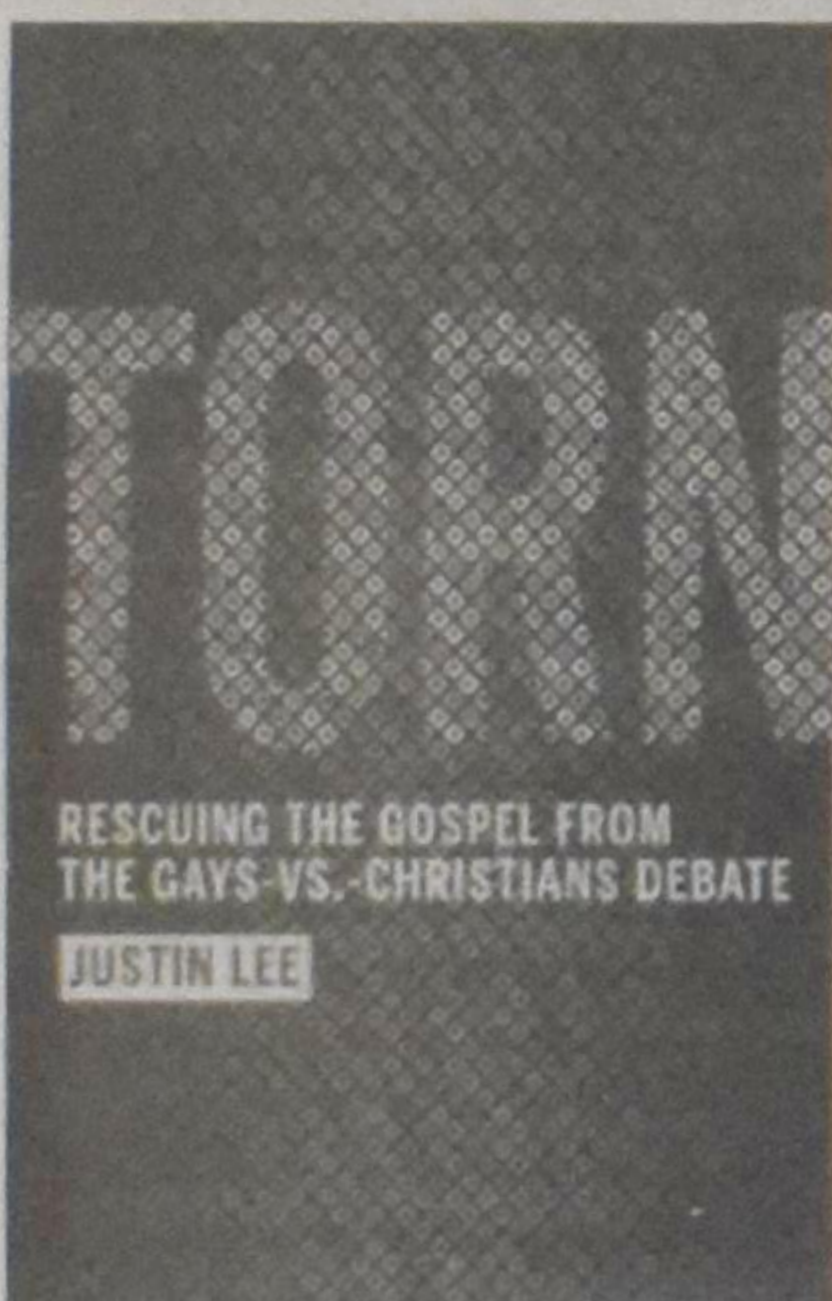
Pylväinen deftly explores the connection between faith and family.

I understand this might all sound quite depressing, even if Pylväinen demonstrates a generosity of spirit toward her characters and her readers. I suppose it is. That said, I think there's much to commend in this novel, especially for those of us who are exploring the connection between faith and family. We may not recognize the rigidity of the Rovaniemis' tradition, but we share the sight of our children leaving the flock in droves, which undoubtedly leaves us with lots of questions about the relationship between family life and faith formation.

We Sinners is a profound exploration of those questions. Pylväinen wants to know *why* we believe, but she seems even more interested in exploring *for whom* we believe. Are we bound to our traditions out of the obligations we feel to each other? Does the fear of letting down our parents or brothers and sisters keep us in the fold? And if faith is lost, what replaces it? What's left for the doubters wandering the uncharted country of unbelief?

A minor note of dissatisfaction: in *We Sinners*, religion is almost purely a social phenomenon. A spiritual dimension to the Rovaniemis' religion is nearly absent; so too is a sense that there is a "halfway" point between fundamentalism and the alienation that takes hold of those who leave this church. While watching the Rovaniemi children push their faith away, I couldn't help but think of dear friends of mine who've also escaped dementing fundamentalism, yet found their spiritual home in more venerable traditions. It's not all loneliness and isolation out there. There are other flocks.

Brian is the CRC Chaplain at the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University.



Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate

Justin Lee
Jericho Books (2012) 272 p.

Today's gay Christians, and the church

Wendy Gritter

Many things have changed since the onslaught of the culture wars over homosexuality. Culture around us has become much more gay-positive. People coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender is much more common. And more people have positive relationships with gay people than ever before. But this does not mean that the culture war is over in our churches. In a world of social media, it isn't difficult to encounter harsh words targeted towards one group or the other. The tensions, both inside and outside of the church, on the subject of gay marriage continue to make navigating this complex terrain challenging and often confusing.

Even where churches have clear doctrinal positions, many Christians feel uncertainty or confusion about what they should think about gay marriage. Other Christians quietly disagree with their church's position. Some Christians worry about where the church might be headed on this matter. And others may feel impatient and frustrated by positions they deem to be disconnected and irrelevant to our current context.

'God-boy' is gay

In the midst of this reality are the lives of gay Christians. They are often torn between their loyalty to their faith and the churches they grew up in, and their honest acceptance of the reality of their same-sex orientation. Justin Lee is such a young man. Justin grew up in the Southern Baptist denomination and was in every way a committed Christian on track to enter full-time ministry. His journey of self-discovery regarding his sexuality turned his world upside down. But it did not ship-wreck his faith.

In his publishing debut, *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays vs. Christians Debate*, Lee shares a story that challenges assumptions and typical ministry interventions. Justin is representative of today's gay Christian. Strong faith. Determined to be part of the church. Maintaining

Christian values around sexual purity. Strong self-awareness. Resisting pressure to submit to potentially harmful change programs. In-depth study of the scriptures. Open to a committed same-sex relationship.

And there is the rub for many Christians. Justin's commitment to his faith is undeniable. His conclusions from his engagement with scripture concerning a future relationship. . . . Well, that may be a whole other matter.

Living tension

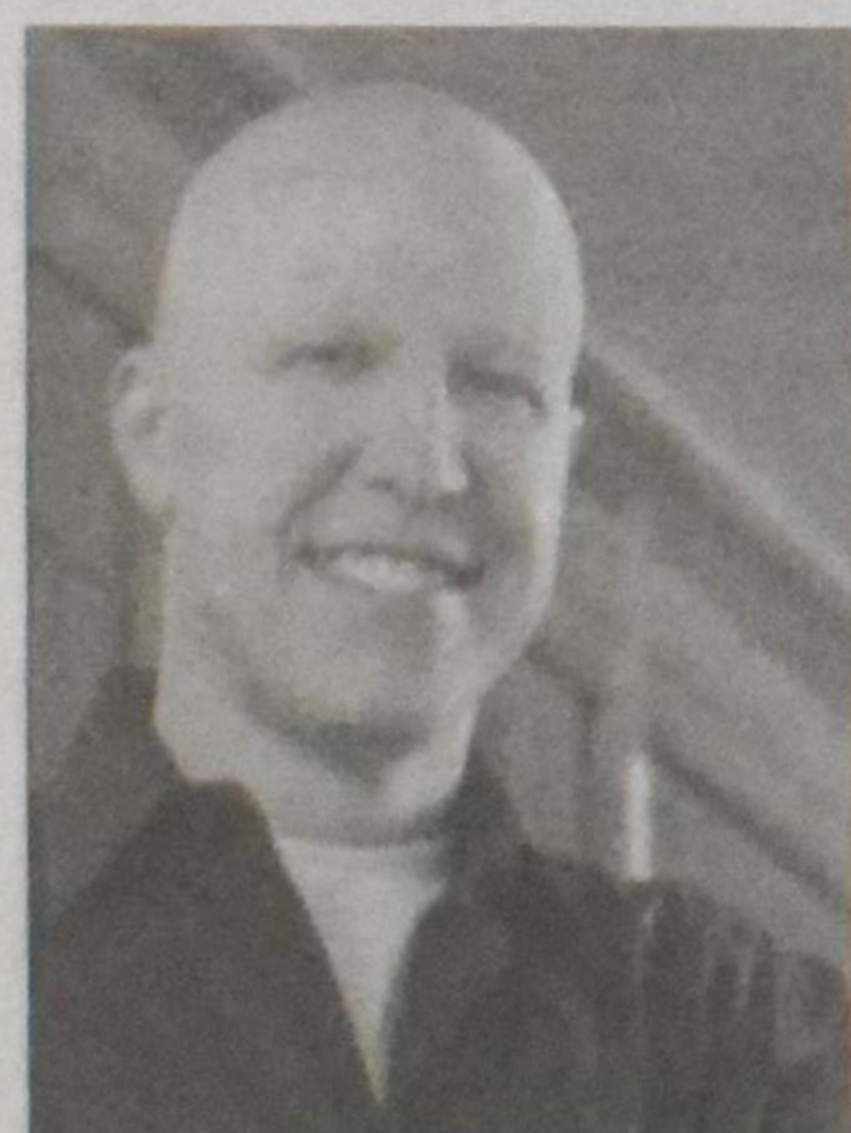
If you're looking for a book that will decisively argue a scriptural case for gay marriage – this isn't the book. No doubt those who want to pick apart his experiences to critique his conclusions will have ample ammunition. Justin's journey is not that of a scholar. He is the Christian who sits next to you in the pew – who happens to be gay. His story is personal and compelling – and one that the church cannot afford to ignore.

So if you're looking for a book that will help you enter the life of a gay Christian who may be very similar to you – this is a great book. Justin's story challenges people in the church to reflect on the lived reality of a committed Christian, seeking God's will for his life as a gay person. Justin's story invites us into the tension that he experienced as he struggled to integrate his faith with the awareness that he would go through life as a gay person.

In addition to his personal story, Justin did enter ministry and became the founding director of the Gay Christian Network. This online community welcomes gay Christians regardless of whether they believe God's word calls them to celibacy or they are open to marry a partner of the same-sex. Justin has been at the forefront of cultivating a community where such differences are secondary to their primary commitment to Jesus Christ. After a decade of engaging with thousands of gay Christians, Justin has some very practical steps for the church to take to be more hospitable to gay people – regardless of where you land on the gay marriage question.

The reality is that this culture war is not going away. Justin's book can serve as a personal invitation to transcend the debate and enter the relational reality of our gay Christian sisters and brothers. This invitation will mean taking some risks and navigating tension and disagreement. But this is the place where the church should be.

Wendy Gritter (wendy@newdirection.ca) serves as Executive Director for New Direction Ministries. New Direction is committed to nurturing safe and spacious places for those outside of the heterosexual mainstream to explore and grow in faith in Jesus Christ (newdirection.ca).



Justin's commitment to his faith is undeniable.

Features

Off-label drug use: What it is and what it may mean for you

Heidi Blokland

"Connection is health. And what our society does its best to disguise from us is how ordinary, how commonly attainable, health is. We lose our health – and create profitable diseases and dependences – by failing to see the direct connections between living and eating, eating and working, working and loving" (From *The Art of the Commonplace* by Wendell Berry).

Wendell Berry, farmer, essayist, critic of culture and follower of Christ, believes that "to be healthy is literally to be whole; to heal is to make whole."

Recall the last time you went to the doctor. Perhaps you were suffering from leg cramps or had a bad cough that wouldn't go away. Chances are you left the office with a prescription for something the doctor believed would make you better, make you healthy. Today more and more people are taking prescription medicine. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention gives statistics indicating that almost 50 percent of people in the U.S. used at least one prescribed drug in the past month. Of 2.6 billion visits to the doctor, close to 75 percent involve some sort of drug therapy. A side effect, one might say, from this increasing concern about health and feeling good, is *off-label* drug use.

When you are prescribed medication for a use that has not been approved by Health Canada or the FDA, it is considered "off-label." For example, Gabitril, a drug that is approved to treat partial seizures, is sometimes prescribed

to patients suffering from depression. The drug has been approved, but not for that purpose.

Using a drug off-label is not illegal. Nor is prescribing drugs for off-label use. Doctors are allowed to prescribe any drug that they believe will benefit their patients, even without specific approval. This happens regularly. The *Montreal Gazette* reported on a recent study conducted in Quebec by McGill University. It found that "11 percent of drug prescriptions are for uses not approved by Health Canada." And also: "The majority of these off-label uses – up to 80 percent – lack studies or scientific evidence for efficacy and safety." The occurrence is even greater in the U.S.

However, does the fact that something is not illegal make it okay? The apostle Paul raises a similar thought in I Corinthians, "Everything is permissible – but not everything is beneficial" (1 Cor. 10:23). Does the use of off-label drugs lead to the health of connections that Wendell Berry is advocating? Disease is not part of God's perfect plan for humans, as can be seen in Jesus' healing miracles and in the New Creation where there will be no more dying or pain. And yet here in our world, sick with sin, disease (or dis-ease as Berry remind us) seems to be a part of our daily life, and with that comes an ever increasing focus on being healthy, especially in ways that cater to our "quick-fix" cultural mentality. Perhaps we ought not be surprised by the proliferation of prescription drug use, including off-label use. But how do we respond? Especially if we rely on an aspirin a day to reduce our chance of a heart attack, a use that is also off-label.

Why off-label drug use?

Let's first make sure we understand the issue and why off-label drug use occurs. Why would a doctor prescribe medicine that has not been approved for that specific use? One answer is that perhaps the doctor is unaware that the drug is not approved for that use. A 2009 survey of U.S. doctors found that "many of them thought that some common drug treatments were FDA-approved when in fact they weren't." With so much information to wade through doctors may not always be aware of what drug is approved for which condition. A comprehensive article published by *Maclean's* reports, "Once a drug is approved, doctors are free to prescribe it based on its official use, a scientific paper, a conversation with a colleague, or even a hunch." And, even if the doctor does know that the drug is not approved for that specific use, he or she is not required by law to inform the patient.

We also ought to consider the role of companies that make the drugs. Why don't companies seek approval for other uses of the drugs? Cost is a big reason. It can be very expensive to do studies and to present that information to Health Canada. If the off-label use of the drug will only benefit a small number of people, the drug company may not see it as worthwhile. Also, if the patent for the drug is about to expire, no new approval will be sought.

Drug companies are not allowed to explicitly market drugs for uses which are not approved. However, they are allowed to report scientific studies about unapproved uses. Some critics assert that drug companies target doctors, training their sales representatives how to steer the conversation to off-label use of

medication. Drug companies can be fined for promoting off-label use of their drugs. One report stated that, "In the past eight years, pharmaceutical companies were fined more than \$10 billion for illegal off-label promotion in the USA." This deterrent, some claim, is seen by the companies as merely the cost of doing business.

What is the role of Health Canada and the FDA in all this? These organizations regulate drug approval, not drug prescribing. It has been recommended that Health Canada formally monitor the use of off-label drugs. Health Canada, however, "insists it can't control what doctors prescribe, a position the FDA also maintains." Health Canada continues to issue warnings about the risks of certain drugs and make recommendations about dosage and usage.

With doctors possibly unaware and probably overwhelmed with the information about drug usage, drug companies unwilling and perhaps unmotivated to seek new approval, and Health Canada potentially unable to regulate, where does this leave us? How do we, especially we who are Christians, seek health when it appears that the system is unhealthy? If "health is connection" as Wendell Berry claims, how do we heal amidst such brokenness? If, as the apostle Paul says, "Everything is permissible for me – but I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Cor. 6:12), how do we keep ourselves from being controlled by drugs and drug companies?

Melding medicine and community

In his essay "Health is Membership," Wendell Berry relates how his brother's life was saved by doctors and medication after suffering a severe heart attack. Berry recognizes that he has "a considerable debt to the medical industry" as his brother "has been restored to himself and to the world." But Berry also felt conflicted by the experience. He felt that in the hospital "the world of love meets the world of efficiency – of specialization, machinery, and abstract procedure." Maybe one of the dangers of our modern medicine is that as connections are broken and the need for efficiency grows, the patient is sometimes reduced to being just that, a patient. Or, worse, a set of symptoms to be cured. At times, the medical industry denies the truth that the patient is a child of God, existing to delight in and give praise to God.

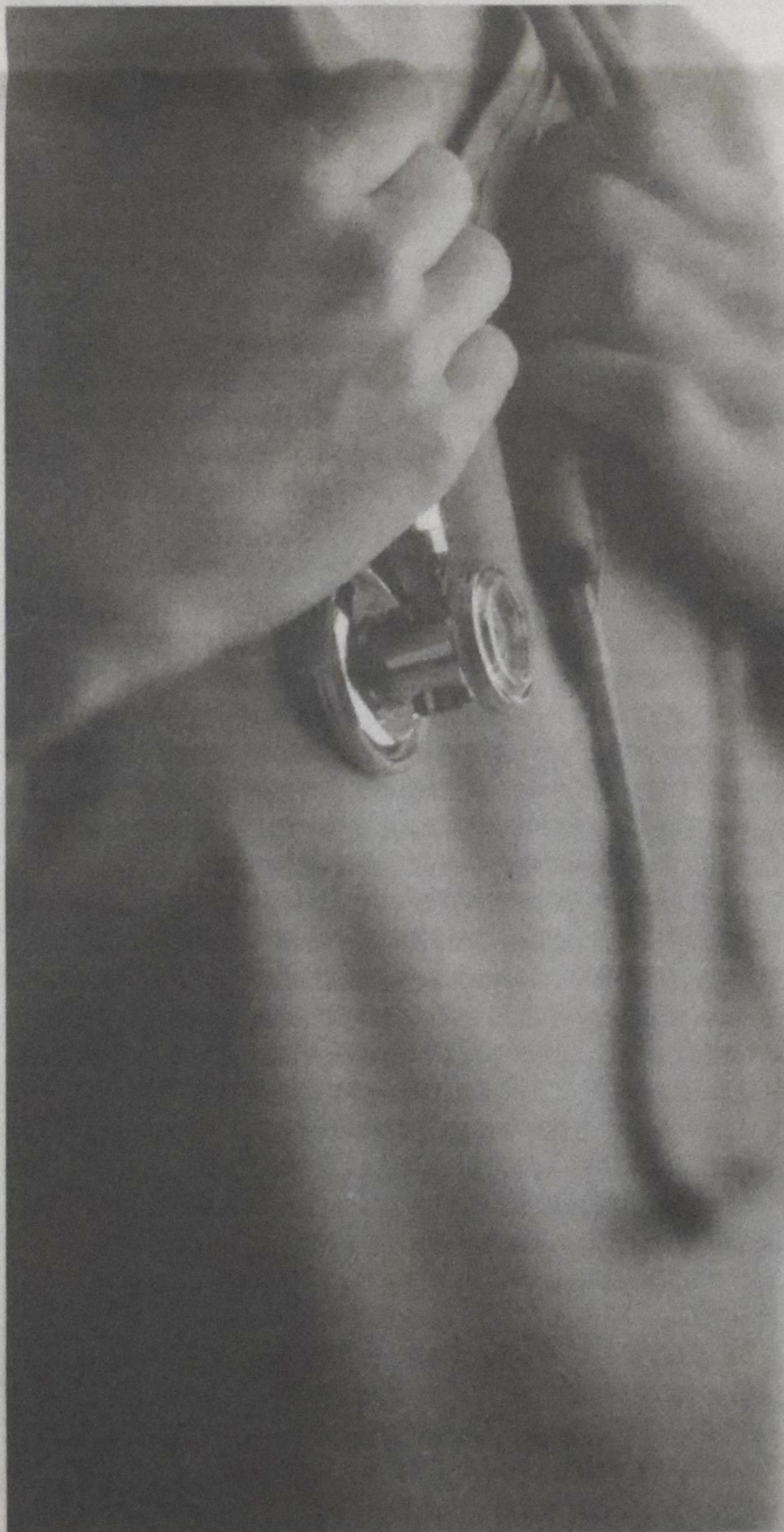
Presumably, many of us have similar stories of loved ones being saved by modern medicine and procedures, perhaps even by drugs that were prescribed off-label. Maybe the point is not that the system can work, not whether we ought to take this drug or that, but rather how can we restore the connections that have been broken – connections between us and our doctors, between the drug companies and Health Canada, between ourselves and our neighbours. Berry puts it this way: "How can a community and its doctors be included in the same culture, the same knowledge, and the same fate, so that they will live as fellow citizens, sharers in a common wealth, members of one another?"

The next time your doctor writes you a prescription, know that this drug may not provide the miracle that the drug companies claim. Being healthy, being made whole cannot come merely through a pill. These are broken tools, given by broken hands, created in a broken system – part of the brokenness that Christ came to restore.

Heidi Blokland is a teacher at Timothy Christian School in Williamsburg, Ontario. She and her husband live nearby and are members of Community CRC in Dixons Corners.



Doctor as saviour?



Features

God loves the brokenhearted

Glenda Dekkema-de Vries

How do you feel when confronted by someone in your church who's constantly down, and there doesn't seem to be any real reason that you can think of? Do you get that strong inclination to slap him or her on the back and say, "Cheer up, God loves you" and walk away?

Because of my experience as a psychiatric RN, and co-facilitator of a faith-based support group for people living with mood disorders called *The Living Room*, and having lived with depression myself, I can tell you that that just won't work, regardless of how sincere you are. Even if you don't have my "expert" knowledge, you may already know that.

You want to help those suffering with depression and reach out to the brokenhearted in your church, and yet you may be hesitant about what to say or do, or you get the sense that your help is being rejected. You may feel like Job's friends who start out by doing the right thing — keeping their mouths shut — but, as the days dragged on, they couldn't help themselves so they filled the void with jibber-jab. They tried to make sense of what God was doing. They tried to figure out his purpose in all of Job's suffering. And they oversimplified a very complex situation. Don't we often try to do that? We want to know why.

Despite how badly we want to, we can't heal someone's deep depression. Often he or she requires professional help including counselling and medication. But we can be a source of comfort.

What we shouldn't say:

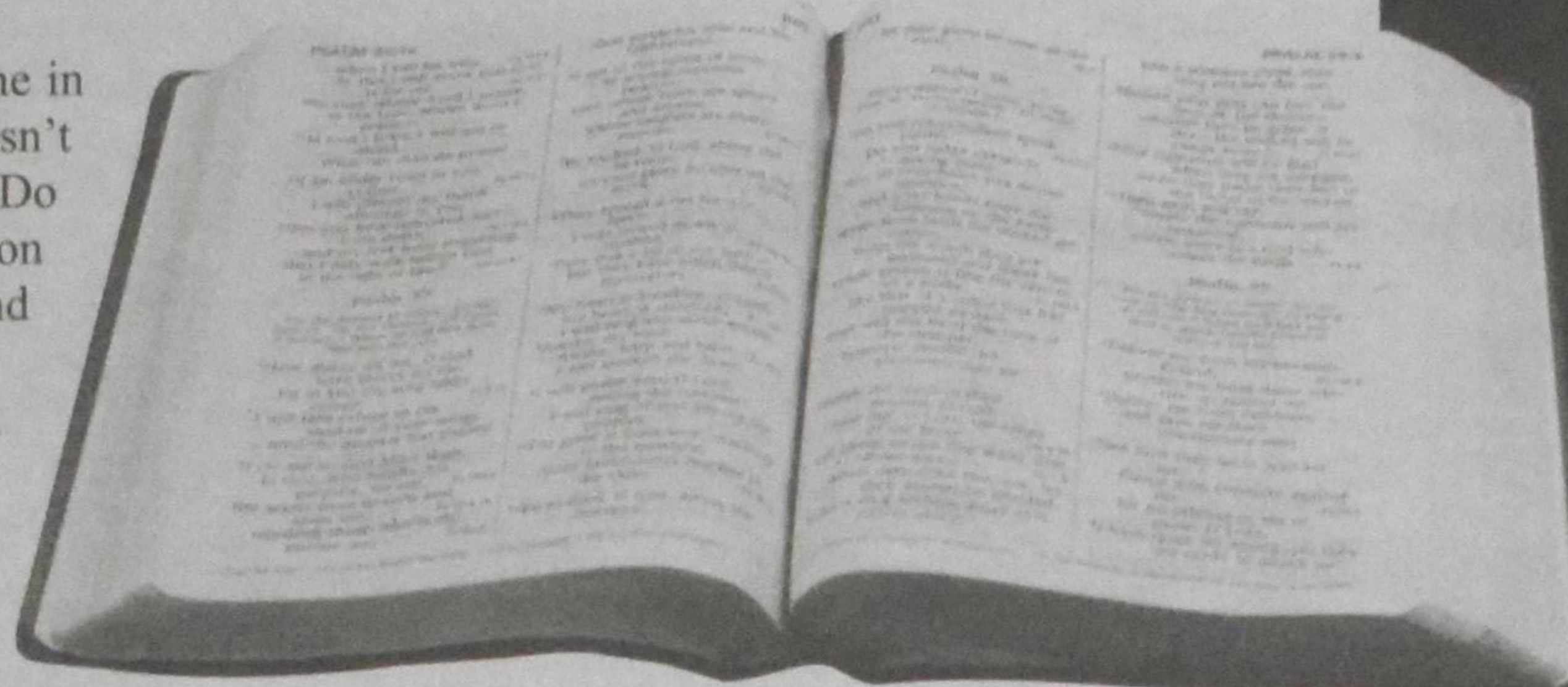
- "You really need to get out more."
- "God's testing you."
- "There must be sin in your life."

Depression affects about 20 percent of our church families. One of the characteristics of deep depression is that whatever is read or heard is often interpreted in cruel, self-critical ways. For example, when my husband and I experienced infertility for 13 years, we felt quite depressed and judged by God and others. At the time, when some well-meaning person said to me, "God doesn't make mistakes," I interpreted it to mean that this person thought God saw us as unfit to parent.

Now that we have two lovely adopted children, and it is a win-win situation for them and us, and we feel God's plan fulfilled, I smile in agreement when people say, "God is good. This was his plan all along." Once my mood lifted, it didn't really matter what anyone said to me. I interpreted it all in a good way. This is a common reaction.

The definition of chronic depression is a low mood disorder that lasts for three months or longer. Depression can be divided into mild, moderate and severe depending on duration and intensity. Clinical studies show that people suffering from mild to moderate depression and/or situational depression can benefit to some degree with lifestyle changes, exercise, change of scenery, attitude changes and reduction of sugar and toxins and other dietary changes. However, severe depression usually needs prescription medication and professional counselling. So, let's be careful not to give advice like, "Go for a walk, mate, you'll feel great."

So, again, what do we do and say when someone is in the midst of misery? How long can you, like Job's friends, remain silent? And the second question is, how beneficial is it to remain silent for long stretches? Obviously you can't just stare at depressed people and hug them endlessly.



The Word: comfort.

Be kind

Acts of kindness always work. Flowers. Chocolates. Spending time with them in some sort of activity or inviting them to events, even if they decline, is helpful. Just knowing someone cares enough to take the time to be present can make someone feel God's love.

Dr. John Toews is a Christian psychiatrist, author and public speaker who wrote the book, *Mental Health and the Church*. He still wrestles with chronic depression despite his knowledge, medical intervention and faith. During a lecture I attended, he cried while explaining what it is like to live with chronic depression. He said that sometimes before his lectures he goes to his hotel room and cries out and wrestles with God, fearful that he won't be able to do what is required of him.

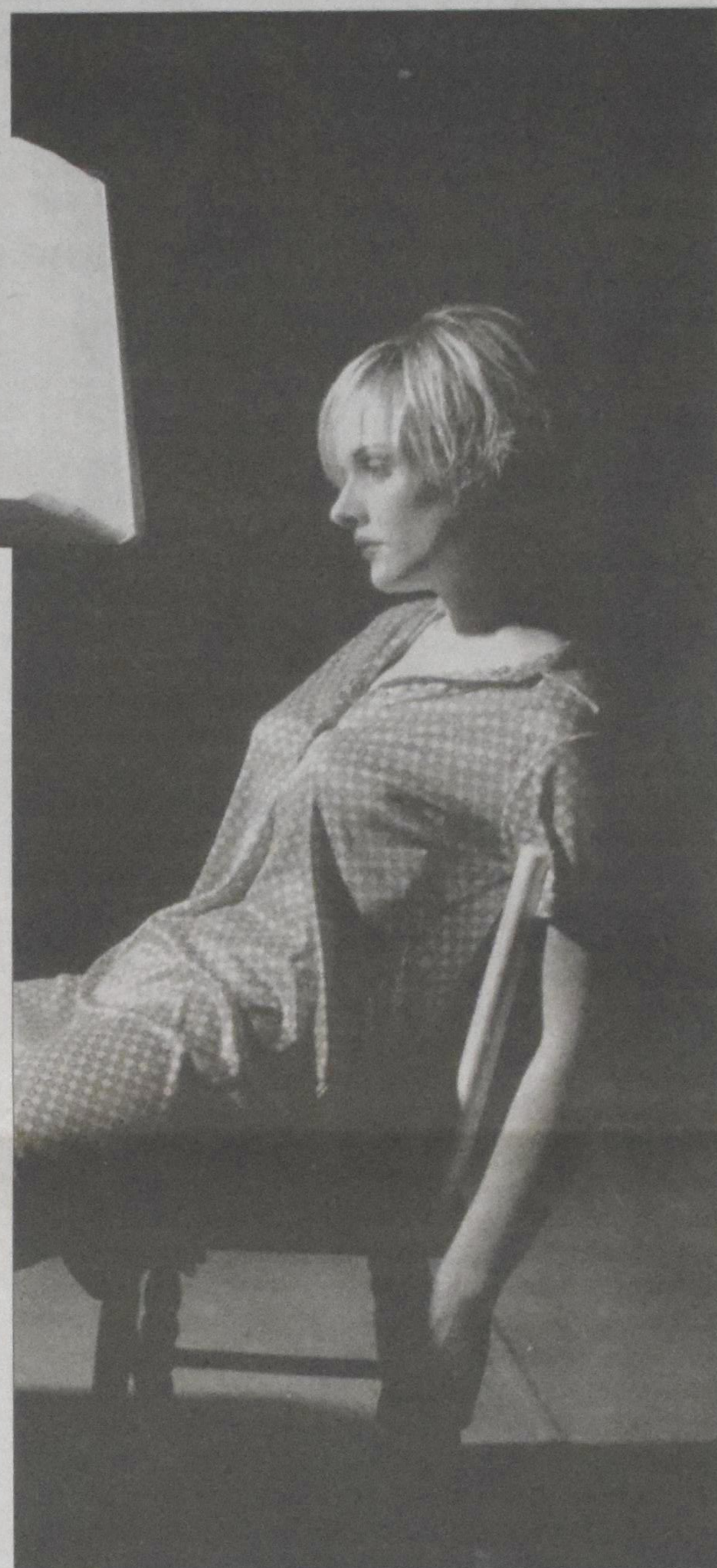
He tells of a memorable moment when a lady in his church saw the depth of his suffering on a Sunday morning, went up to him, put her arms around him and said, "This is so unfair that this is happening to you." He was overcome with her empathy and kindness. Hugging has been proven to increase levels of oxytocin, the feel-good hormone. Plus, her words showed she understood.

Despite his suffering, he told God that he wouldn't want him to remove his chronic depression if that meant he would also erase all the things he had learned through it and all the benefits. Because of his personal experience with depression, he is more empathetic with his patients, he is a better writer and speaker on the subject and is definitely more effective in his practice as a psychiatrist.

I was shocked! Then I started looking at my personal situation. If God would ask me if I would like him to take away my infertility, live my life over and grant me healthy biological children in my twenties when I wanted them — no grieving, no depression, no health issues, no struggles — but I would have to give up the benefits as well, I realized that I, too, would say, "Absolutely not!" Why not? Because my faith is stronger, my husband's faith is stronger, our marriage is thriving and we are both more empathetic towards the cries of others. Besides, we have two lovely children whom we love as much as any biological children we would have had. Most importantly, these children might otherwise not have grown up in a Christian home.

I decided to ask the members of *Living Room* support group the same question. Would you want to give up your mental health issues, plus all the benefits that came with it, if that is what God asked? They all said no.

In the *Living Room* support group we talk about our experiences of the previous two weeks. We spend time discussing chosen Bible passages and articles that cover aspects of mood disorders such as loneliness, trust issues, isolation, living a significant life, following God's will, coping, insomnia, hopelessness and feeling judged. These articles were written by Marja Bergan, who suffers from



Depression affects the whole person.

bipolar disorder and is the founder of *Living Room*, and we also get inspiration from a Christian book of short stories called *Hot Apple Cider* and *A Second Cup of Hot Apple Cider* edited by N.J. Lindquist and Wendy Elaine Nelles.

We help members of the group to look at the Bible texts in an uplifting way. One person who no longer attends church because of the lack of empathy he felt there has said, "This is my church." If Jesus were in our midst, he would put his arms around the depressed person and say, "This is so unfair that this is happening to you." He might cite Ps. 34:18: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." ➤

More information about *Living Room Support Group* can be found at livingroomsupport.org.

Glenda Dekkema-de Vries, BA, former RN, is a public speaker and a writer on health issues. She lives in Stouffville, Ont. with her husband and two children.



Features



Christian Courier is pleased to present this fifth article in a six-part series on First Nations topics. Our guest writers are author James C. Schaap and PhD candidate Seth Adema. James Schaap focuses on the CRC's outreach efforts to the Navajo and Zuni people in Rehoboth, N.M., while Seth Adema, who is studying aboriginal interactions with the Canadian criminal justice system, examines Canadian concerns. We encourage our readers to offer feedback either by way of a letter to the editor (editor@christiancourier.ca), comments online at christiancourier.ca or by tweeting us at twitter.com/ChrCourier.

Righteous acts, filthy rags, and a mission cemetery: Part III

Probing the mystery

James Schaap

With the memories of Rehoboth I heard, I began to try to fit things together, pieces of a history that includes those memories, as well as the long lines of white crosses over unmarked graves in Rehoboth cemetery, the Navajo rug on my wall, and my own grandfather's place in this century-old mission enterprise, the CRC's first substantial mission enterprise, undertaken in the 1890s, at a time when the denomination was a wooden-shoed adolescent on a North American continent it barely knew or understood.

How do we understand that story? How do we measure our history? What story does this old rug of mine tell?

When I asked a man why his father, who never became a Christian, sent him to Rehoboth boarding school, his answer was simple – a tradition of goodness. “He went to the hospital – and people there were so friendly and so ready to help the Navajos,” the man told me. “That was in the back of his head.”

Open doors

But what had drawn him to trust the hospital? – he was, after all, a medicine man? “My dad's older sister is buried at Rehoboth. She probably died in the hospital. The Indian Health Service – probably didn't exist in those days. But Rehoboth hospital – our people, at least my family, got their medical treatment there. That was the open door.”

And more. “My dad's mom could have died there, too. We don't know where she is buried. They could have gone there for their medical needs. The Rehoboth hospital was there for years already [before the late 30s].” The respect of the hospital staff persuaded him that what would go on at the school would be as beneficial to his son as the medical services had been to his family in their time of real need, at death.

Traditionally, the Navajo regard for death is uniquely their own. According to Raymond Friday Locke, in *The Book of the Navajo*, “Death and everything connected with it is repulsive to the *Dineh* and dead humans are buried as quickly as possible.”

The corpse was repulsive. Many believed the dead were capable of inciting great terror. Early Rehoboth missionaries understood the Navajo traditional views of death. Already in 1910, Cacia Hartog tells her white readers, “Great fear of death exists among the Navajos. When one is about to die, the relatives usually forsake him and leave him to die alone. . . . The hogan in which some one [sic] has died is henceforth a devil's house and is shunned and feared as much as the graves over which evil spirits [sic] are believed to hover” (27).

Ms. Hartog recognized that a cemetery was a formidable threat to Navajo culture. “Our children have entirely conquered these superstitions,” she writes. “They often visit the Rehoboth cemetery and decorate the graves. At the last funeral the boys assisted in the digging of the vault and lowered the casket.” Clearly, Hartog understood that when her students helped bury a dead body, they were rejecting their own traditional culture. “. . . Undoubtedly the time is coming when the Navajo people shall say, ‘Death where is thy sting? Grave where is thy victory?’”

she writes, “when death shall be regarded not as a terror, but as a door opening into life everlasting.”

When, 25 years later, one of the men I interviewed came to Rehoboth school, the cemetery still scared him. “You know how boys talk about ‘skin man’ and all of that? – the ghosts? – and one time this boy came rushing in from way over there in the graveyard, [where they said they had seen] something white . . . I was scared to death.”

What he remembers is an evil spirit, a “skinwalker,” who dresses in animal pelts, moves about on all-fours and often desecrates gravesites. “I covered my head with a sheet in my bed,” he told me. “And finally, Miss Van came out – [and I told her] ‘so-and-so is telling us he saw a big old light over there tonight.’ ‘Don't you ever think that way,’ she says, ‘-doooda, doooda’ – ‘no, no, no.’”

There in the Rehoboth dormitory, use of the Native language was not forbidden; in fact, even the Anglo matron preferred to use Navajo to the children. But did she understand that the simple act of comforting a little boy's fears may have ushered him farther away from his native culture? Maybe what she did that night was nothing more than any mother might have done. “She was just like a mom,” he'd told me earlier.

Best deeds and filthy rags

When I think about all of this, I can't help but doubt my own grasp of what I consider to be truth. I can't help but imagine where I too might be wrong, where even my faith in God may well have led me in a direction that was my own and not his.

But I'm drawn to that moment, upstairs in a mission dormitory, a half-century ago: a shivering little boy, scared of a skinwalker. And of a woman who held him in her arms, much as any mother would, spoke to him reassuringly in his own language, and tried to take his burdens on her own shoulders.

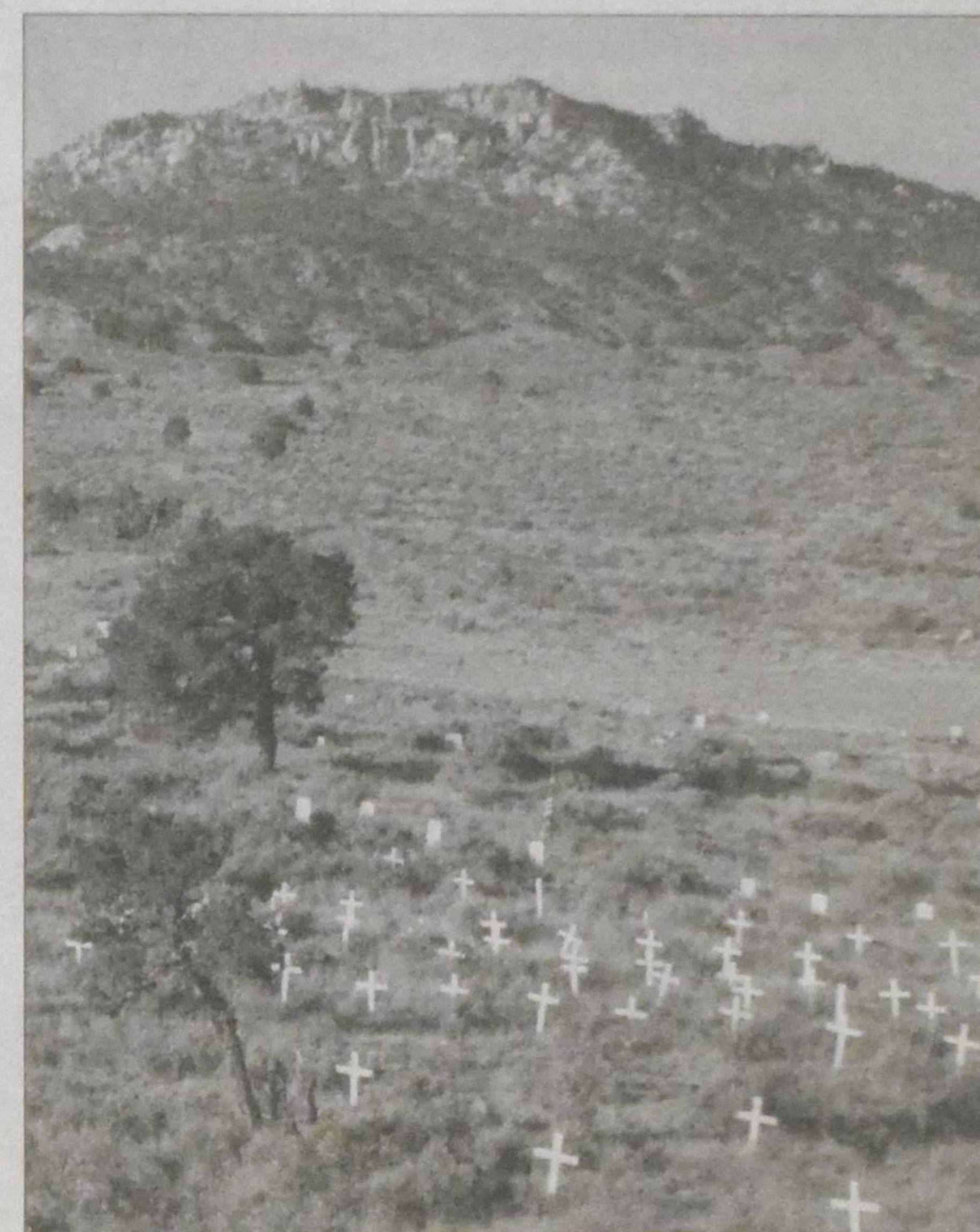
I wonder sometimes if we understand only half the truth of that Old Testament judgment about good and evil. “All of us have become like one who is unclean,” Isaiah says, “and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away” (Is. 64:6).

But the flip side can offer comfort when we all wonder who's stalking in the darkness. It's not simply that our best deeds are as filthy rags, but that our filthy rags may be our best deeds when transformed by the magical righteousness of God's own hand.

Then there's this. The duties that attend the death of a relative and loved one were so repulsive, experts say, that earlier in tribal history, the job was assigned to the Navajos' slaves, then to Anglo traders. If Anglo traders, why not missionaries? That's what I'm thinking.

Today in the Rehoboth cemetery several long rows of wooden crosses show their age. None are lettered, nor do any of them mark a particular grave. Together they stand like sentries, but no one seems to know exactly anymore why they're there.

I asked around, and the daughter of a 90-year-old, life-long, ex-maintenance worker at Rehoboth mission spoke to her father, who today is in a rest home a couple thousand



How do we measure our history?

miles away. The crosses, he told her, marked roughly where people thought graves might have been, burials that were never recorded.

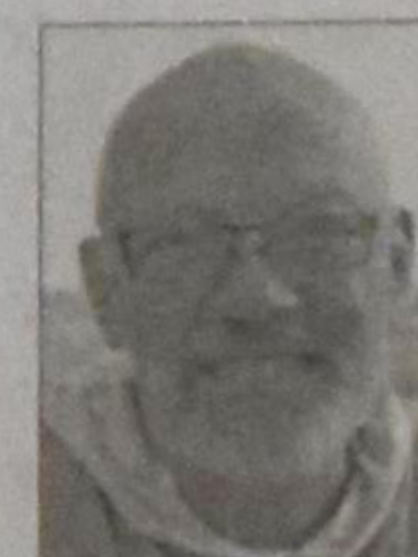
And then this. A retired college prof who's been trying to shape up the mission's own archival materials came across ancient note cards that document what went on in the earliest years of the hospital. This is what he told me: “It is interesting that some people were brought to the hospital dead because it was assumed that the hospital would take care of it.”

In its earliest years, Rehoboth hospital acted as a mortuary. I'd like to think that taking Navajo dead would have been consistent with the “holistic mission” of Rehoboth, medical personnel who not only couldn't refuse a suffering patient, but even the bodies of those who had already been deceased.

I'm unsure how those early missionaries qualified their acts of mercy, what Bible verses they might have based their decision to take dead people upon, but I'm grateful that today that the Rehoboth cemetery holds many a mortal coil of Navajo folk who were brought to the mission for no reason even close to hearing the Christian faith, but simply because the men and women of the institution – even if they didn't understand it all that well themselves – offered comfort to the depths of Native fears, the fearful urgings of their cultural heritage. Maybe they were being most Christ-like at that moment, when they were being most considerate of Native culture.

Maybe – or so I'd like to think – even my own ancestor's filthy rags, in the hands of the Lord, can become their very best deeds. And ours. ✂

*James Calvin Schaap is professor emeritus at Dordt College. He is the author of over 20 books including the recently published *Honest to God, Sixty at Sixty and Rehoboth: A Place for Us*. He blogs at siouxlander.blogspot.com.*



Columns

From the 11th
Province

Marian Van Til



Suffering saints: Called to patient endurance and faithfulness

We live in a fallen world of pain and woe, but none of us likes to suffer, in body, mind or spirit. Our society tells us: strive to lead a happy, pain-free life. That's why pain relief and countless associated drugs (not to mention psychiatric services) are a multi-billion dollar industry.

Alleviating pain is a blessing. God has placed us in a time when much physical suffering can be abated, and we should thank him. Yet we need to beware of being averse to suffering, especially for our faith. Paul tells us, "It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him" (Phil. 1:29). *Granted to us?* I daresay that most of us don't see that as good news. Nor will we nod happily when Peter urges, "If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name" (1 Pet. 4:16).

Why praise God for *that*? "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God" (v. 17). That is: persecutions we suffer for Christ's sake are judgments sent us by God, to purify us, to bring us close to him. Our proper response? "So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" (v. 19). Hebrews reinforces this: the "author of our salvation" was "made perfect through suffering" (Heb. 2:10) – and we are his brothers and sisters.

'Rejoice in suffering'?

Peter pointedly tells us, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." (1 Pet. 4:12-14). *Rejoice* in suffering? That seems fanatical. Most of us have not suffered for Christ's sake, and frankly, we don't want to. But the apostles force us to ask: If I am not suffering at all for Christ's sake, am I lukewarm? (Rev. 3:15).

God appoints specific gifts and burdens for persons, nations and ages. We're aware that in most Muslim countries, many steadfast Christians are tortured, even beheaded. But that's over there, we assure ourselves. So far, God's purposes have allowed his saints in 21st century North America to bask in religious freedom, and dying for his name's sake isn't remotely on our radar.

Perhaps we have become complacent with that grace. Both Paul and Peter were brutally killed for Christ, as apparently were all the apostles except John. But in John's Revelation, when the martyred saints cry out, "How long, Sovereign Lord . . . until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" – God reveals the peculiar fact that they must wait "until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who

were to be killed as they had been was completed" (Rev. 6:10-11).

Of the already martyred saints God assures us, "They overcame [Satan, the accuser] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (Rev. 12:11). It's not impossible that God has appointed some of *us* to be among that number.

The beginning of the end of our "comfort" is now arriving. Ever more enemies of the Gospel tell us the Bible is rampant with "hate speech," the Bible's God is despicable and we believers are bigots. Christian groups and schools are increasingly unable to "discriminate" by hiring only Christians. Some pastors and priests among us will surely be forced to solemnize same-sex (or even polygamous) "marriages" or face prison. A refusal will be seen no differently than racial discrimination.

The screws are tightening. Ever more people will worship "the beast," says Revelation, until, apart from those whose names are written in the Book of Life, "the whole world" will follow him: the beast who "was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them." That is terrifying. It calls, we are told more than once, "for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints" (Rev. 13:10, 14:12).

But there's good news: this isn't happening because Satan has somehow wrested control from God. It is *God's* design. And "if God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). When we are asked to "give account of the hope that is in us" and must suffer grave consequences for it, we must put away fear. Our sovereign God assures us that the Spirit will give us the right words to say.

The slain Lamb will draw close to us in our suffering. And our suffering-death for his name's sake – should he require that of us – will be precious in his sight.

As we persevere, let us remember to pray daily for our fellow believers who are already suffering and dying for our Saviour's sake.

*Father, please repeat the hist'ry
of Your Church in other lands,
where the blessing has come painf'ly
as Your sovereign will has planned.
May we too endure the suffering,
sacrificing our desires,
ready too to enter glory
through the persecution fires.*

Hugh G. Wetmore,
from *The Suffering Song* ✕

Marian Van Til (mvantil@roadrunner.com) is a former CC editor living in Youngstown, N.Y. She blogs at ReformedRevelry.wordpress.com.

ARTFUL EYE



Sea with Seagulls, *Frank Sawyer*.

Infinity

I'm looking whimsically
across Lake Kathlyn
knowing that some day
I must leave this place –
yet counting every day
a day of grace:

an exercise
in which we again begin
to wonder at it all –
to marvel, marvel when
we see the cosmic space
from star to star
ever expanding chase
of energetic space
explosive stardust
whirling galaxies
laws of gravity and levity
forces of life
magnificent designs
with surprising intricacies.

O, why the Milky Way
and why the planet earth?
Why the rising sun
and why our work and play?
Why the tossing sea
dark depths we have not seen,
why a trillion grains of sand
with crabs and buried clams?
Or, why in Spring new birth
of daffodils and lambs –
and sunlight shedding mirth
through a blossoming cherry tree?
Why the logic of our whys
and why the painful thought:
'things could be otherwise'?
Why the need to live from hope?
Why our heart's affinity
with infinity?

Lord, I marvel, marvel,
at it all:
the stars, the lambs
the questions and the hope,
that like the tossing sea
guide us back to Thee.

Frank Sawyer

Frank Sawyer has taught in seminaries in Latin America and Hungary for almost three decades. Check out his website at srta.tirek.hu/lap/sawyerf. His book of poems, *A Way of Seeing*, can be ordered by emailing fsawyer777@gmail.com.



Columns

Words from
Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin

Bullying: it's
bigger than Bill 18

Most Canadians are aware of Bill 18, the anti-bullying bill. It has created a great stir within the evangelical church community. Many petitions, articles and sermons are circulating as we dialogue about the relevancy of this bill.

Having worked for the last seven years in a ministry that seeks to be a safe and confidential place for those dealing with relational and sexual issues, including gender issues, Bill 18 doesn't sit well with me.

At the same time, I have come to realize that there is a component here that we are missing. The evangelical Church can fight this bill, arguing that to enforce private Christian schools to form gay-straight alliance (GSA) groups forces them to do something that goes against their moral belief structure. I oppose the bill too, not primarily because of the GSA component, but because it leaves huge segments of kids unprotected.

What about the fat kid, the skinny kid and the acne-prone kid; what about the nerd, the cheerleader, the virgin, the Christian, the Sikh and the atheist; what about the black kid, the white kid and the native kid? The list could go on! Will we be creating alliance groups for everyone?

The bill is flawed when it comes to 90 percent of the population, all of whom deserve the right to not be bullied. I love groups, especially ones that provide a safe and respectful environment, but this bill has only identified two specific groups, LGBT and disabled students.

Oppressed

For me, the bullying began at age 11. I was called every name in the book and tossed around in school every day until I was 18. I was subjected to ridicule and harassment. Even some teachers took their insecurities out on me, pushing me further into a mess of confusion. Was the school safe for me? NO. But neither was the community. I had a few good friends, but for the most part growing up in small town Manitoba (hockey haven), I didn't fit the mould. I rubbed up against the insecurities of those around me. Running the water in the sink with the razor in my hand, holding the pill bottle, awakened me to the depth of my trauma. Things changed in Grade 12 when I went to a private Christian school. Or did they?

Kids were still picked on at the Christian school. Having had traumatic experiences of bullying, I could well see subtle and blatant bullying, social standing vs. poverty, jock vs. geek. It was subtle and yet still damaging to both the bully and the victim. Most kids who are bullied also bully!

Years later I came out and proclaimed my gay identity as my right. I was adamant that no one would hurt me, ridicule me or do this to others. I worked for years in the education system and fought hard to do my part to stop bullying. I jumped on the EGAL bandwagon and began to see a focus that wasn't healthy. Sure, this segment of the population needs a safe place, but so does every kid, regardless of who they are.

A safe place needed

Then because of my faith, I chose to not identify myself as gay and sought to understand the complexities of my gender and sexuality. Surprisingly I faced bullying again, both subtle and blatant. I was now taunted and ridiculed by those whom I had fought for! The ones that were bullied were now bullying me. Saying I was hateful, a bigot and a liar. I was slandered and run through the mud because of my faith in Jesus.

The reality of this Bill is that there is something much bigger going on. We are seeing that those of faith are being bullying because of their beliefs. There is a double standard here that will cause an ever greater sense of bullying. How are we being respectful, regardless of faith and sexual identity? How can we respect diversity even if we don't agree with one another?

I think people on both sides of this Bill need to see the bigger picture of a very diverse demographic photo. Jesus has called us to be his hands and feet and to love our neighbours well. He didn't say that we should agree with everything they do, but we are called to love well. No matter what happens with this Bill, how are we promoting safe and respectful places? We can do this by seeking wisdom and understanding through the word and relying heavily on Jesus, who gives us all we need to do it well enough. ➤

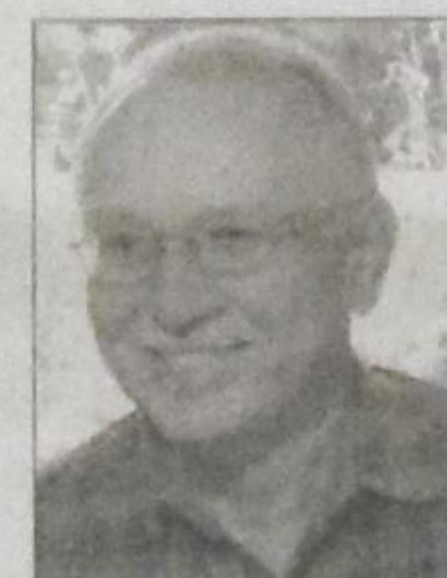
Kenny Warkentin (kenny66@gmail.com) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter.



I seed a pasture with a hand-cranked seeder (top left). I am just finished putting up the sign that names the dugout for the bulldozer operator who dug it (right). I am in the chicken coop with the chickens who are training for the Olympics by jumping for bread in my hand (bottom left).

Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch



Do not resent manual labour; work on the land was ordained by the Most High.

Ecclesiastes 7:15

I have trouble trusting people who don't have dirty fingernails or manure on their boots.

They may have knowledge and insight, or be accomplished at various digital technologies; they may be savvy in public relations or politics; they may be brilliant at managing stock portfolios, seminary curricula or an NHL franchise.

But there is something very right, very incarnational about working with the raw stuff of creation, and so I admire oil rig roughnecks, gardeners, diaper-changers, beef ranchers, cooks and nursing home attendants. Not for them a once-removed career. First-hand experience is what they have; "first-order experiences" (my phrase, I think) somehow keep us humble, give us satisfaction and ties us to the beginnings of human existence.

These thoughts come to me at age 64. My wife still needs me, and still feeds me (à la Lennon and McCartney). But I can't do the chores, due to a back problem that involves the nerves in my right leg. I'd like to make a list of the things that I love doing that I can't do:

- feed the cows
- finish the "sun-porch" for the chickens
- hook up the television aerial (remember those?)
- shovel snow
- winnow my oats and wheat from last summer
- move or split firewood
- help skin a cow

Precious dust

I knew an old man with what was congestive heart failure. His relatives discovered him one

Finding true joy in labour

evening on his hands and knees with a trowel digging potatoes. They "removed" him from his pleasure.

A young lady with a disability that wouldn't let her walk without one of those canes with four little legs at the end told me: "If guys would only see past my disability . . . I would gladly lie on the kitchen floor and scrub it on my belly. It would be a privilege."

When my father retired after a career as school teacher and principal, someone asked him if he would miss school. He replied, "Nope. I fix bicycles, trap muskrats and do lots of other things."

What is common to these examples is a stated or implied satisfaction with labour, ordinary labour. When I read *The Guide*, the Christian Labour Association's magazine, I look first for the photos of people who work at nursing homes, or in the oil patch, or in factories. As a former teacher and sometimes preacher, I am not one to trash-talk the life of the mind, but I do find that we live in a culture where Newfie fishermen are not accorded the respect given to Toronto financiers. What a pity. From dust we are, and to dust we shall return. We are of the dust. As a Lutheran prayer puts it, "We are *Your* precious dust."

I am quite proud to be a farmer and gardener. I only wish my back and legs would let me work in dust, soil and manure.

God's gift it is to eat and drink,
to find true joy in labour.
No matter what someone may think,
What God does lasts forever.

©Calvin Seerveld, 1986 ➤

Curt Gesch is partially-abled; he lives in Quick, B.C.

Columns

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove



Q. I am 49, married for 25 years and have two young adult children. My husband is 51 and a steady and dependable breadwinner for our family. And while we look like a typical happy family, I want to tell you I recently watched the film *Take This Waltz* on Netflix and have been unsettled ever since.

In the film, Margot – a married but bored writer of tourist brochures – meets a man called Daniel while on a business trip to Canada's East Coast. As she flies home, she discovers that not only is he on her flight, but he lives in her neighbourhood. As time goes on they bump into each other and find out they are attracted to one another. Eventually, they become involved in a sexual relationship. He is single, but – as I mentioned – she is not. Which brings me to my story.

I too am attracted to another man. I also bump into him on a regular basis because he and his family have moved into our church community. At the same time, the difference between Margot and myself is that I had a short relationship with this man, in my early twenties before I met and married my spouse. We had a half a dozen dates, but I felt the relationship was moving too fast sexually so I decided not to see him again. I now know I made my decision based on fear more than anything else.

And so, when I see him now, I feel strongly attracted to him and I often catch him staring at me, which allows me to believe he may feel the same. More specifically, I am thinking there may be some unfinished business between us. At the same time, we are both married and I prefer to keep our earlier relationship private. I am pretty sure neither spouse knows about any of this. At least, that is my hope.

A. While there is an age difference between you and Margot in the film, the reality is we can be susceptible to the charms of members of the opposite sex at any time in our lives, whether married or not. Having said that, I assume you feel unsettled because you are surprised you are attracted to your friend of years ago. At the same time, I am thinking there may be something more here.

The emptiness within

First, you wonder if there may be some unfinished business between you and him. I am curious about that. Would *you* by chance have some unfinished business with your former friend? If so, what could that be? Second, you refer to making the decision years ago not to continue the relationship with him as based on fear. I am also curious about that. Would you have continued the relationship if you had addressed the problem differently? And if so, where do you think this relationship would have gone? Third, you hope neither spouse knows about "any of this." I am curious about that too. What is it about this relationship you do not wish your spouse to know?

Your answers to the above questions will give you insight into the beliefs or assumptions you may have about your situation. My hope is once you get a clearer understanding of *yourself* in regards to your former friend, you will be able to deal with it effectively.

From my perspective, the film did not end on a happy note. I appreciated Geraldine's warning to Margot – we all have a gap in our lives that follows us around no matter what kind of life we forge for ourselves. I believe this to be the premise of the film. Many of us are uncomfortable with this gap or the feeling of emptiness as it is often described, and we try to fill it in various ways. (Remember Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to*

Death). In *Take This Waltz*, Margot chooses to become involved with Daniel to fill the gap.

As Christians, some of us see the gap as our separation from God as a result of sin. Others see it as fruitful place to grapple with life's questions. And then there are those of us who painfully tumble into the abyss of emptiness because our understanding of God does not fit our suffering and we learn to live in this vacuous place. But the gap or feelings of emptiness can leave us restless and vulnerable.

In your case, I suggest that once you gain some understanding of *yourself* by going through the above process, you leave your issue in the past, where it belongs. You walked away from your former friend before and you can do so again. With the help of God, you are stronger than you think.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and member of the Fleetwood CRC in Surrey, B.C.



In *Take This Waltz*, Seth Rogan and Michelle Williams play married couple Lou and Margot.



I choose to believe, every day.

Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga



The day I found Jesus in my bedroom

The light, falling through broken blinds on our unmade bed and the books piled up, dog-eared and clothes on the floor and laundry folded in a basket waiting to be put away. It was early morning and the boys, all four of them this Easter weekend, were doing a jellybean hunt outside with Trent. Spring was sounding in the snow melting in the gutters, and this bedroom was, for all of its unkempt-ness, heavy with something holy.

I was in my pajamas and making the bed but I couldn't shake the feeling that I wasn't alone. And I turned, and friends: I saw him. Not with my physical eyes, but with my spiritual ones. I don't know how else to explain it, but on Sunday morning, Easter morning, Resurrection morning, Jesus entered my bedroom and stood in the middle of the un-vacuumed carpet and held out his crucified hands to me.

And he told me he wanted me to see him, to know him intimately because of what I would be facing in the coming weeks and months. Because of the persecution. Because of the calling he's placed on my life to be a voice in the desert and me standing in my pajamas with the light splitting through broken blinds.

I didn't say anything. I just stood there. Felt the heaviness of the holy and heard the sound of children's laughter through the window and felt the warmth of his body in that room. I didn't physically see him. Yet I knew he was there, and I heard him, with the ears of my soul.

And then he was gone and I was left with the distinct impression that I was changed.

I was still in my grey flannels but you can't encounter the risen Lord and hear him say your name and remain the same.

But there's always a choice.

And even as I slipped into church clothes and stubbed my toe while quietly swearing I wondered if it had all been a dream, and *just like that I needed to choose to believe.*

Intentional doubt

Each day, I choose. Many moments, I choose. It could have been a piece of undigested beef. Or it could have been Jesus. That sunrise could have been a gift, or just a cosmic occurrence. That healing could have been the doctors, or God answering prayer.

I choose to believe. Because if I don't . . . if I say, "That was nice, but it probably wasn't a visitation from Jesus. It was probably too many late nights or my imagination or . . .," then each day, I'll believe a little less until one day, I'll wake up, and all I'll have is doubt.

I'm not saying I don't doubt. But *I doubt with the intent of discovering truth.* I doubt out-loud to God. I speak it to God in conversation, I tell him what I'm struggling with, and I lay out my fleece, over and over, because I'm Gideon to the tenth degree and my faith is smaller than a mustard seed, and I need God, I need God, I need him.

So those ordinary, everyday moments in which Christ transfigures himself – maybe through the kiss of a child or through an answered prayer or through an extra 20-dollar bill found in your pocket or a bag of groceries at your front door – those are pivotal. They are sacred altars disguised as daily triviality. They are tests disguised as chance. They are gifts disguised as cosmic occurrences.

We are not physical beings. We are spiritual ones, having a physical experience. But unless we choose to believe it, we'll never find a resurrected Jesus standing in our bedrooms while the sunlight leaks through broken blinds.

Emily Wierenga is the author of *Chasing Silhouettes*, and *Mom in the Mirror: Body Image, Beauty and Life After Pregnancy* (coming Mother's Day, 2013). For more info, please visit emilywierenga.com.

News

Business before politics: Merchants set up court to handle Israeli-Palestinian trade disputes

Tired of waiting for a political solution, Israeli and Palestinian businessmen are taking matters into their own hands, launching a court to handle business disputes properly.

Joshua Mitnick

Tel Aviv (CSM) – Secretary of State John Kerry has put Palestinian economic growth high on the agenda with his recent shuttle diplomacy to restart peace talks, but a group of Israeli and Palestinian business leaders are a couple steps ahead of him.

The last few years, amid a dearth of political progress, they have been working toward the establishment of an arbitration court, the first of its kind, to resolve cross-border-trade business disputes between Israelis and Palestinians that otherwise have no realistic address for adjudication.

Economic collaboration between Israelis and Palestinians has been hobbled by the lack of a neutral forum for settling disagreements between Israeli and Palestinian businessmen when they arise. Palestinians and Israelis face restricted access to each other's territory and have little trust in courts lying across the border. Without any legal recourse for problems like a bounced check, transactions become riskier and less attractive, cooling commercial ties.

So they created the "Jerusalem Arbitration Centre," which is sponsored by chamber of commerce associations on both sides and slated to begin its work by the end of 2013. The goal is to give merchants and investors peace of mind, eliminating disincentives to expanding the trade relationship that totals \$4 billion a year – Palestinians' largest such relationship, by far. The court will consist of two Israelis, two Palestinians, and five international legal or arbitration experts. The Israeli and Palestinian governments have agreed to enforce the court's rulings.

"The trade community became a cash-based community, because there was no recourse if a check bounced," says Sam Bahour, a Palestinian businessman. "If [the arbitration court] gets traction, it could be something interesting."

Skirting politics

As part of the revived push for a peace agreement, Israel, the U.S. and the Palestinians are devoting substantial time and attention to efforts to boost the Palestinian economy, believing economic growth would improve the environment for negotiations.

Many of the steps, such as ceding Israeli control over some parts of the West Bank so the land can be devoted to Palestinian economic projects and relaxation of restrictions on Palestinian movement, are likely to face opposition from hardliners in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet. The U.S. is also expected to transfer more aid for infrastructure projects.

The arbitration centre is something different. Three years in the making, it is a homegrown, independent effort by business communities on both sides to smooth commerce – in spite of chilled relations between their governments, a vacuum of negotiations, and Israeli bar-



Rifat Hisarciklioğlu, chair of the arbitration centre, is a Turkish business leader.



Palestinian Munib Masri played a major role in the creation of the centre.

riers on movement and access that handicaps Palestinian businessmen.

"It has nothing to do with the political process. It has to do with surviving the conflict and not ending the conflict," says Samir Hulileh, the chief executive of Padico, a Palestinian conglomerate with businesses from real estate to telecommunications to manufacturing. "It gives confidence to investors. Investors should see there's an exit, and that they're not part of a problem held up in the political process."

The effort has been spearheaded by Palestinian billionaire Munib Masri, the owner of Padico, and Oren Shachor, a former major general who oversaw the Israeli government's civil administration of the Palestinian territories.



Palestinian vendor.

At the outset of a transaction, businessmen will sign contracts agreeing to use the Jerusalem Arbitration Centre in the event of a dispute. Should a case be brought to the court, it will be handled by a panel of three arbitrators – one Israeli, one Palestinian and one international. The decisions will then be referred to local courts, whether in Israel or the Palestinian territories, which will oversee implementation and enforcement by police authorities.

It's unclear, however, how the court would handle a trade dispute linked to geopolitical issues like the movement and access restrictions on Palestinians dictated by Israeli security authorities.

Creating trust

Last month, days after the announcement of a plan to

normalize estranged ties between Turkey and Israel, the local chambers of commerce said the arbitration centre will be chaired by Rifat Hisarciklioğlu, a Turkish business leader close to Turkish President Abdullah Gul.

Turkey was chosen because it remained an important trade partner for Israel, despite the deteri-

oration of relations between the two governments in the last couple years. For the Palestinians, Turkish involvement represents the presence of a Muslim regional power that has actively supported the Palestinian cause.

"Turkey is a country that is close by, and we have a huge cycle of business with," says Mr. Shachor, who believes trade between Israel and the Palestinians will double in five years as a result of the arbitration. "The centre is a bridge between Palestinians and Israelis."

Israeli and Palestinian companies trade in everything from agriculture, to building materials, to telecommunications services. Companies in all industries might end up availing themselves of the arbitration centre.

It will potentially simplify the lives of those like Brian Thomas, a British Israeli who imports computer equipment and then sells to Palestinian vendors in the West Bank. He says all of his transactions are in cash, which forces him to carry tens of thousands of dollars in cash at a time.

If a joint court worked as advertised, he says he might consider allowing Palestinian clients buy on credit, although he says he remains skeptical because enforcement of transaction claims is lax, even among Israelis.

"Everybody knows there is no legal recourse if they run away with your money. If I looked into it, and it was real, and I had confidence, it might mean that I would do more business with these guys," he says. "But Israeli courts chasing Israelis is hard enough, to go after an Arab in Nablus sounds stupid."

Improved trade with Israel would be an economic boon for Palestinians: the current \$500 million in annual exports to Israel represents 80 percent of all Palestinian exports. Even a 25 percent increase would be significant, says Saad Khatib, the former director general of the Palestinian Federation of Industries.

Mr. Khatib says that in order to create the conditions for long-term growth of the Palestinian private sector, Israeli and Palestinian politicians need to sit down and negotiate a new customs regime that will give Palestinians control over tariffs on goods from abroad while preserving free trade between Israelis and Palestinians.

He suggests that politicians take their cues from the business community.

"The private sector wants to work together and wants to improve the situation," he says. "Generally, the private sector is miles ahead of any government. Hopefully it will play catch up."

Joshua Mitnick has reported on Israel and the Palestinian territories for the Christian Science Monitor (CSM) since 2004. He lives in central Tel Aviv.



Classified

| Birthday | | Anniversaries | |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Nelly Dykhouse will celebrate 90 years on May 6, 2013.</p> <p>Her children: Mike and Carol Gerrit and Cori Henk and Pam Clarence and Tina Willemiena and Courtney 15 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren praise God for her full and loving life and the blessing she is to them.</p> <p>An Open House will be held in Nelly's honour on May 4, 2013 at the Baldoon Golf Club, 7018 Dufferin Avenue, Wallaceburg, ON from 2-4 pm.</p> <p>Nelly's address is P.O. Box 347, 4416 St. Clair Parkway Port Lambton ON N0P 2B0</p> | | <p>JOE AND SALLY FEDDEMA (nee Lootsma) celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on March 12, 2013 at their home in Florida.</p> <p>An Open House will be held for them on Sunday, April 28, from 12-2 pm. following morning worship at Springdale CRC.</p> <p>May God continue to bless you in the years to come.</p> <p>With love, your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.</p> <p>Home address: P.O. Box 163 34 Tecumseth Pines Dr. R.R.#4 Tottenham ON L0G 1W0</p> | |
| <p>Vacation</p> <p>Holiday accomodation in Holland with vehicle rentals, tours. www.chestnutlane.nl</p> <p>Housekeeping cottages (2 - two bedroom, 1-three bedroom) on Georgian Bay near Killbear Provincial Park north of Parry Sound Ontario. Sandy beach and bottom, level rock for walking, water deepens gradually. www.jacknifecottages.com. Contact us at 416-818-4505 or lynn@jacknifecottages.com.</p> | | <p>Nieuwe Pekela Beachburg 1953 2013</p> <p>With joy and thankfulness to the Lord, we hope to celebrate with our parents and grandparents,</p> <p>EGBERT AND JANTINA DRENT (nee Muller) the occasion of their 60th wedding anniversary on May 12, 2013, D.V. "Commit your way to the Lord, trust in Him, and He will act." (Ps. 37: 5) We pray that the Lord may continue to bless them in the years to come.</p> <p>Their loving children: Harma & Gerry Lof – St. Catharines, Ont. Christine† & Ralph Bergsma – Pembroke, Ont. Margaret & Bill Schuurmans – Hallville, Ont. John & Janet Drent – Brampton, Ont. And ten grandchildren and 16 great grandchildren.</p> <p>New address (effective May 3): 156 Noik Drive Pembroke ON K8A 7W4</p> | |
| | | <p>JOHN AND RITA PRINZEN 1953-2013</p> <p>With thankfulness to God we hope to celebrate our parents' 60th anniversary on May 9th 2013.</p> <p>We praise God for his faithfulness.</p> <p>Bert and Helen Prinzen – Niagara Falls Ont. John Prinzen and Jean (fiancée), Brian – Niagara Falls Ont. Pastor Bill and Grace Hoogland – Wyoming Ont. Dave and Karen Vanderploeg, Kendall, Dylan – Michigan Isaac and Kaitlin Hoogland, Lincoln – Burlington Ont. Derek Hoogland – Michigan Archer John Prinzen (†1967)</p> <p>Address: 3758 St. James Ave. Niagara Falls ON L2J 2P9</p> | |
| | | <p>Obituary</p> <p>Bert den Boggende of Brooks, Alberta, passed away on Monday, March 18, 2013, at the age of 70 years. The funeral service was held at the Christian Reformed Church in Brooks on April 20th. Reverend Martin Boardman officiated. See article, p.5.</p> | |

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Events/Advertising

The social (studies) network: Africa's cellular education revolution

Africa is the fastest-growing market for cellphones in the world, and they're increasingly being used to power the continent's educational breakthroughs.

Lee-Roy Chetty (CSM)

For a continent that has historically been largely unconnected via land-based telecommunications, mobile telephony uptake over the last few years has been nothing short of a revolution on the African continent.

In 1995 there were an estimated 600,000 mobile phone subscriptions in Africa. A decade later this number rose to 87 million and in 2012 it was estimated that there were 735 million mobile subscriptions on the continent. This makes Africa currently the fastest growing and second-largest market for mobile phones in the world.

For the first time in its history, large numbers of Africans can communicate with each other over distance, receive information, and access services via mobile devices. As a result mobile telephony has significantly impacted the way people communicate, socialize, play, pay for things, and interact with their governments.

These connections also offer an opportunity for education.

Mobile technologies are being used to distribute educational materials, support reading, and enable peer-to-peer learning and

remote tutoring through social networking services.

A tangible example of this is Mxit, Africa's largest home-grown mobile social network. The South African technology start-up not only allows its young users to stay in touch by text chatting, it also facilitates live tutoring for mathematics homework. Dr. Math on Mxit, a project launched in 2007, has helped more than 32,000 school-aged children work through math problems by connecting them with tutors for live chat sessions.

Uneven access

While the mobile revolution is taking off in Africa, it must be noted that the mobile landscape is spread unevenly across and within countries on the continent. Some areas have good mobile broadband in place, while in others access is unreliable and limited to basic services such as voice calls and SMS.

To have a real impact on education, mobile learning initiatives must – and do in Africa – cater to a range of technology contexts.

An example is Nokia Life, an information service with more than 70 million subscribers in India, China, Indonesia and Nigeria. In Nigeria its popular information channels deliver exam preparation tips for middle and high-school students, health education aimed at families, and English language learning. The service has traditionally used SMS to deliver the content. Nokia Life+, launched in late 2012, uses mobile data to offer an improved content experience. As mobile data connectivity infrastructure improves, additional services will come online across Africa.

However, the barriers to fully realizing the potential of mobile learning in Africa are often complex and significant.

For instance, while prices for mobile usage have dropped, they are still too high for many Africans, who spend on average of 17

percent of their monthly income on mobile phones and connectivity plans. In comparison, people in North America and Western Europe spend under two percent. Additional obstacles include a shortage of local-language content, low levels of literacy that make mobile learning difficult and a low numbers of smartphones and digital tablets that could enable richer mobile learning experiences.

School or district policies that ban mobile phone usage are another hindrance. Still, despite the challenges, which are increasingly being addressed, mobile learning, either alone or in combination with existing approaches, is supporting and extending education in ways not possible before on the continent.

The past decade has seen a surge in the number and types of physical devices that can support digital platforms. Where it was once possible to categorize devices into three broadly delineated "classes" – mobile phones, tablet computers and desktop computers – the lines between these devices have shifted and blurred, and today technology that fits comfortably in a person's pocket or handbag can open a plethora of educational opportunities previously restricted to stationary technology.

Small devices are hardly limited in terms of power. A high-end smartphone has the same computing power and many of the same multimedia functionalities as mid-range desktop computers that are 20 times as large. Additionally, high-resolution touch screens, intuitive operating systems and applications designed specifically for use on small screens have mitigated, if not eliminated, many of the disadvantages of mobile technology versus traditional desktop computers.

As mobile hardware and the networks that support them become more powerful, more dynamic and more affordable, the mobility of these technologies offers new options for teaching and learning. Education studies have historically conceptualized technology as existing in two separate spheres – at schools and in students' homes – but this dichotomous view is changing and does not fully describe how many



Two young women check out the photo of themselves with the Mandela statue on their cell phone at Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton, outside of Johannesburg, South Africa.

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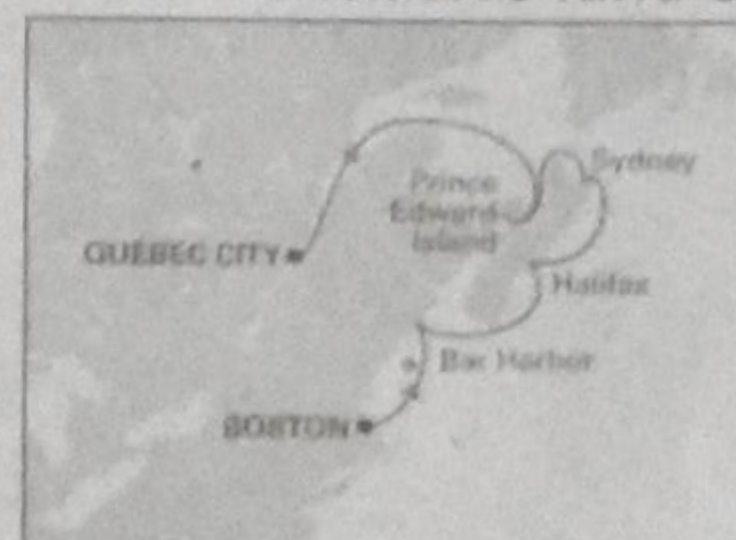
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young people use and conceive of technology.

Today, learners are likely to have technology with them constantly, either at home, at school, on public transportation, at work, even in bed. Technology use is no longer, to a large extent, geographically constrained.

The widespread availability of information technologies has also sparked important societal changes, and these changes are beginning to ripple into education. People are rightfully asking what easy and instant access to these devices means for education.

This article is courtesy of Christian Science Monitor (CSM). A version of this post originally appeared on the author's personal blog.



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News

Refugee health: Churches need to speak out

New 'Proud to Protect Refugees' campaign is launched

Brad Wassink

Every April, we celebrate Refugee Rights Day in Canada, which affirms refugees' claims to life, liberty and security. This April, a campaign called "Proud to Protect Refugees" has been launched, and it's determined to highlight how important refugees are to our communities.

This emphasis is necessary, because last June, the federal government made drastic cuts to refugee health care as provided by the Interim Federal Health (IFH) program. This program provides coverage for medication, eye care, dental care, prosthetic devices and wheelchairs. Without the IFH, provinces and refugee sponsors, many of whom are churches, are forced to cover these expenses.

In the year since the federal government made disturbing cuts to its health care program for refugees, the medical community has rallied strongly against the government's decision. The response from churches has been more fractured and subdued. But we still have time. Between now and Refugee Sunday in June, there is time for our churches to study the situation and to speak up in support of this vulnerable group in our midst.

The impact of reduced health care for refugees has been devastating. One woman, 36 weeks pregnant, was told to bring \$3,000 to her next obstetrics appointment because she was no longer covered. After weeks of investigation and worry, IFH reinstated her coverage at the last minute. In multiple cases, care is simply being denied. A young girl from a malaria-affected country developed a high fever but couldn't have tests to rule out malaria. Elsewhere, a man was denied urgent eye surgery to prevent blindness.

The problem with these IFH cuts is that they pit refugees against Canadians. When the cuts were announced, the rationale



University of Alberta student Bashir Mohamed held this sign outside a Conservative party BBQ.

given by the federal government was telling. They cited cost savings to Canadian taxpayers, equity between coverage for refugees and Canadian citizens and deterrence to prevent more refugees from entering Canada and abusing our healthcare system.

Furthermore, the only medical conditions now covered for all refugees are those that pose a threat to public health or security. The underlying assumption in all of this is that refugees are dangerous and should only be helped to the extent that it protects Canadian citizens.

Health care professionals responded

Last year, health care providers were persistent and unified in their requests for the cuts to be rescinded. A nation-wide coalition that included the Canadian associations for nurses, dentists, pharmacists, family physicians, surgeons, psychiatrists, midwives, social workers, optometrists, pediatricians and medical students conducted research, wrote letters and rallied across Canada.

They launched a program that shared vivid examples, like those mentioned

above, of how unnecessary costs and confusion over the new rules are leaving many refugees to suffer tremendous hardship without appropriate care. Letters were sent to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and the provincial and territorial Ministers of Health and of Citizenship and Immigration. Health care workers from coast to coast held a National Day of Action, including an impressive event on Parliament Hill, something they plan to repeat this year on June 17.

And they made an impact. On June 26, 2012, just days before the cuts were to come into effect, the government quietly announced that the changes would not apply to government sponsored refugees. It was a minor victory, as there would still be limited or no supplemental health care coverage for privately sponsored refugees. So advocates persisted, holding candlelight vigils across the country on December 15 to call for full reinstatement of IFH coverage.

Churches had little impact

The churches' responses lacked the persistence and unity of the medical community. Many wondered where Christians even stood on the issue. Yet over the past year, these cuts have hit them hard in both their ministries and financial health.

Rose Dekker, Refugee Coordinator for World Renew, explains the threat: "Churches and community groups already raise between \$20,000 and \$30,000 to settle a refugee family. It has been a huge benefit that they didn't have to worry about those additional costs." She worries about refugees arriving with serious and expensive medical needs, a definite possibility given what refugees have survived. "This could cause a church to go bankrupt," she says, "and as we promote refugee sponsorship among our constituent groups, we have to be up front about the potential risk."

Great work was done by some faith communities. Anglican, Lutheran and Presbyterian leaders wrote to the government requesting the cuts be rescinded. The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, as well as the Christian Reformed, Quaker and United churches prepared information for their members, encouraging them to write their MPs.

Hospitality House Refugee Ministry in Winnipeg, along with the Anglican diocese of Rupert's Land, sued Citizenship and Immigration Canada for breaching their contractual obligation of providing coverage under the IHFP. Students from Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg started the 59 Cents Campaign for Refugee Health Care that encouraged Canadians to send 59 cents – their portion of the alleged taxpayer savings from the IFH cuts – to their MP.

Yet these efforts could have made a



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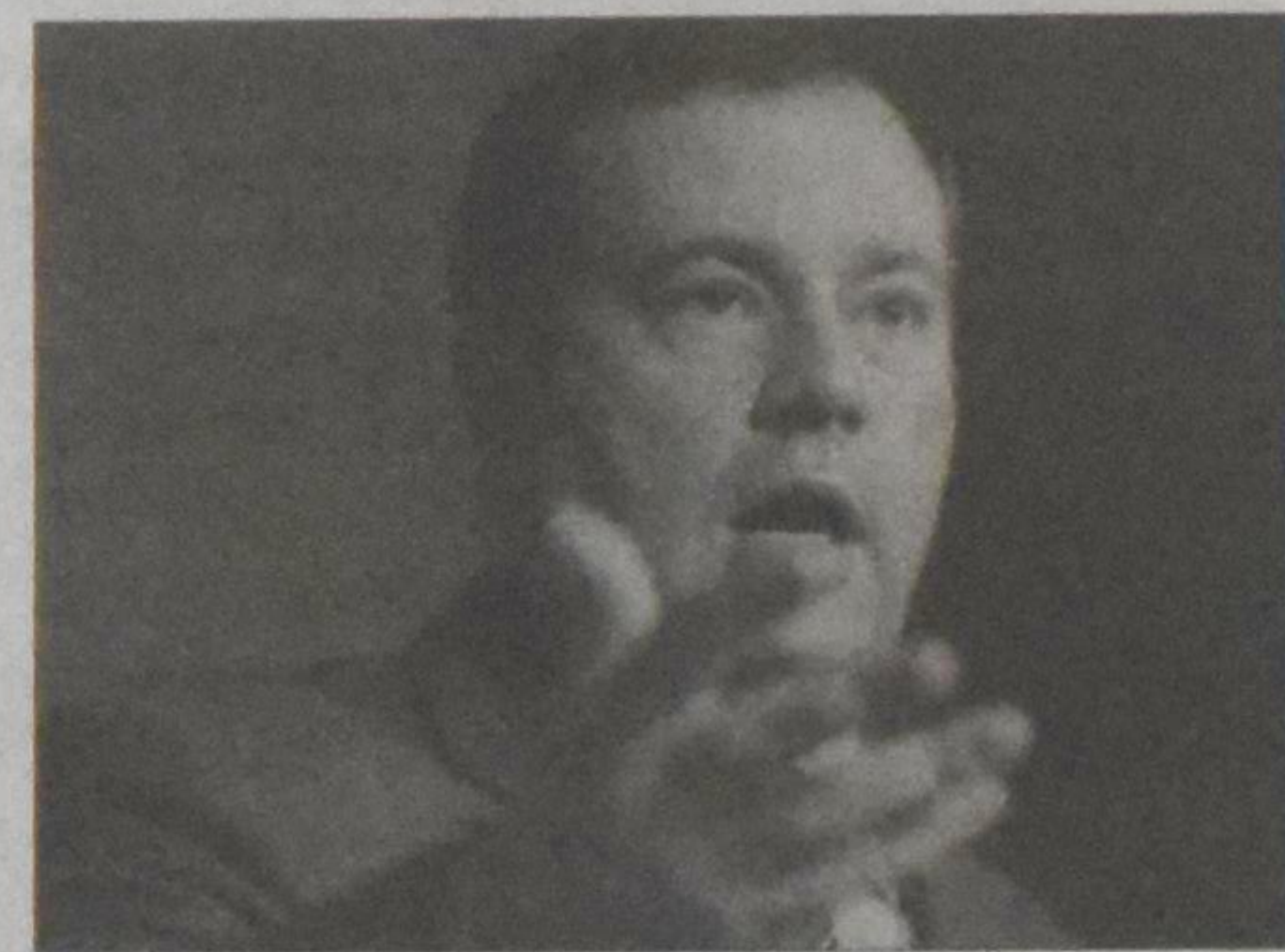
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CHRISTIANCOURIER

larger impact with more collaboration, persistence and promotion. Dekker says, "If all the churches had united, perhaps we could have accomplished something already."

Perhaps they still can. On April 4, Refugee Rights Day, the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) launched a new campaign that uses refugee voices to promote an alternative, positive vision of refugees in Canada. Colleen French of the CCR explains: "The 'Proud to Protect Refugees' campaign is asking organizations to make a public declaration of their support for refugees and people seeking support in Canada."



Citizenship and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney.

We now look forward to Refugee Sunday in June, a significant day for many Christian denominations. Between now and then, churches will have plenty of opportunities to come together to show their support for refugees. This can include writing a letter to Citizenship and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney, hosting discussions to educate people about the importance of refugees or publically declaring that they are proud to protect refugees.



Brad Wassink is a policy intern with Citizens for Public Justice (cpj.ca).



Health care workers rally against proposed changes to health care for refugees.